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NEW GRUB STREET

VOL. II.

NEW GRUB STREET

A NOVEL

BY

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AUTHOR OF 'THE NETHER WORLD' 'DEMOS' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. II.

LONDON

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NEW GRUB STREET



CHAPTER XIII

A WARNING

IN the spring list of Mr. Jedwood's publications, announcement was made of a new work by Alfred Yule. It was called 'English Prose in the Nineteenth Century,' and consisted of a number of essays (several of which had already seen the light in periodicals) strung into continuity. The final chapter dealt with contemporary writers, more especially those who served to illustrate the author's theme—that journalism is the destruction of prose style: on certain popular writers of the day there was an out-pouring of gall which was not likely to be received as though it were sweet ointment. The book met with rather severe treatment in critical columns; it could scarcely be ignored

(the safest mode of attack when one's author has no expectant public), and only the most skilful could write of it in a hostile spirit without betraying that some of its strokes had told. An evening newspaper which piqued itself on independence indulged in laughing appreciation of the polemical chapter, and the next day printed a scornful letter from a thinly-disguised correspondent who assailed both book and reviewer. For the moment people talked more of Alfred Yule than they had done since his memorable conflict with Clement Fadge.

The publisher had hoped for this. Mr. Jedwood was an energetic and sanguine man, who had entered upon his business with a determination to rival in a year or so the houses which had slowly risen into commanding stability. He had no great capital, but the stroke of fortune which had wedded him to a popular novelist enabled him to count on steady profit from one source, and boundless faith in his own judgment urged him to an initial outlay which made the prudent shake their heads. He talked much of 'the new era,' foresaw revolutions in publishing and bookselling, planned every week a score of untried ventures which should appeal to the democratic generation just

maturing ; in the meantime, was ready to publish anything which seemed likely to get talked about.

The May number of *The Current*, in its article headed 'Books of the Month,' devoted about half a page to 'English Prose in the Nineteenth Century.' This notice was a consummate example of the flippant style of attack. Flippancy, the most hopeless form of intellectual vice, was a characterising note of Mr. Fadge's periodical ; his monthly comments on publications were already looked for with eagerness by that growing class of readers who care for nothing but what can be made matter of ridicule. The hostility of other reviewers was awkward and ineffectual compared with this venomous banter, which entertained by showing that in the book under notice there was neither entertainment nor any other kind of interest. To assail an author without increasing the number of his readers is the perfection of journalistic skill, and *The Current*, had it stood alone, would fully have achieved this end. As it was, silence might have been better tactics. But Mr. Fadge knew that his enemy would smart under the poisoned pin-points, and that was something gained.

On the day that *The Current* appeared, its treatment of Alfred Yule was discussed in Mr. Jedwood's private office. Mr. Quarmby, who had intimate relations with the publisher, happened to look in just as a young man (one of Mr. Jedwood's 'readers') was expressing a doubt whether Fadge himself was the author of the review.

'But there's Fadge's thumb-mark all down the page,' cried Mr. Quarmby.

'He inspired the thing, of course; but I rather think it was written by that fellow Milvain.'

'Think so?' asked the publisher.

'Well, I know with certainty that the notice of Markland's novel is his writing, and I have reasons for suspecting that he did Yule's book as well.'

'Smart youngster, that,' remarked Mr. Jedwood. 'Who is he, by-the-by?'

'Somebody's illegitimate son, I believe,' replied the source of trustworthy information, with a laugh. 'Denham says he met him in New York a year or two ago, under another name.'

'Excuse me,' interposed Mr. Quarmby, 'there's some mistake in all that.'

He went on to state what he knew, from Yule himself, concerning Milvain's history. Though in this instance a corrector, Mr. Quarmby took an opportunity, a few hours later, of informing Mr. Hinks that the attack on Yule in *The Current* was almost certainly written by young Milvain, with the result that when the rumour reached Yule's ears it was delivered as an undoubted and well-known fact.

It was a month prior to this that Milvain made his call upon Marian Yule, on the Sunday when her father was absent. When told of the visit, Yule assumed a manner of indifference, but his daughter understood that he was annoyed. With regard to the sisters who would shortly be living in London, he merely said that Marian must behave as discretion directed her. If she wished to invite the Miss Milvains to St. Paul's Crescent, he only begged that the times and seasons of the household might not be disturbed.

As her habit was, Marian took refuge in silence. Nothing could have been more welcome to her than the proximity of Maud and Dora, but she foresaw that her own home would not be freely open to them; perhaps it might be necessary to behave with simple frankness,

and let her friends know the embarrassments of the situation. But that could not be done in the first instance; the unkindness would seem too great. A day after the arrival of the girls, she received a note from Dora, and almost at once replied to it by calling at her friends' lodgings. A week after that, Maud and Dora came to St. Paul's Crescent; it was Sunday, and Mr. Yule purposely kept away from home. They had only been once to the house since then, again without meeting Mr. Yule. Marian, however, visited them at their lodgings frequently; now and then she met Jasper there. The latter never spoke of her father, and there was no question of inviting him to repeat his call.

In the end, Marian was obliged to speak on the subject with her mother. Mrs. Yule offered an occasion by asking when the Miss Milvains were coming again.

'I don't think I shall ever ask them again,' Marian replied.

Her mother understood, and looked troubled.

'I must tell them how it is, that's all,' the girl went on. 'They are sensible; they won't be offended with me.'

'But your father has never had anything to

say against them,' urged Mrs. Yule. 'Not a word to me, Marian. I'd tell you the truth if he had.'

'It's too disagreeable, all the same. I can't invite them here with pleasure. Father has grown prejudiced against them all, and he won't change. No, I shall just tell them.'

'It's very hard for you,' sighed her mother. 'If I thought I could do any good by speaking—but I can't, my dear.'

'I know it, mother. Let us go on as we did before.'

The day after this, when Yule came home about the hour of dinner, he called Marian's name from within the study. Marian had not left the house to-day; her work had been set, in the shape of a long task of copying from disorderly manuscript. She left the sitting-room in obedience to her father's summons.

'Here's something that will afford you amusement,' he said, holding to her the new number of *The Current*, and indicating the notice of his book.

She read a few lines, then threw the thing on to the table.

'That kind of writing sickens me,' she exclaimed, with anger in her eyes. 'Only base

and heartless people can write in that way. You surely won't let it trouble you?'

'Oh, not for a moment,' her father answered, with exaggerated show of calm. 'But I am surprised that you don't see the literary merit of the work. I thought it would distinctly appeal to you.'

There was a strangeness in his voice, as well as in the words, which caused her to look at him inquiringly. She knew him well enough to understand that such a notice would irritate him profoundly; but why should he go out of his way to show it her, and with this peculiar acerbity of manner?

'Why do you say that, father?'

'It doesn't occur to you who may probably have written it?'

She could not miss his meaning; astonishment held her mute for a moment, then she said:

'Surely Mr. Fadge wrote it himself?'

'I am told not. I am informed on very good authority that one of his young gentlemen has the credit of it.'

'You refer, of course, to Mr. Milvain,' she replied quietly. 'But I think that can't be true.'

He looked keenly at her. He had expected a more decided protest.

‘I see no reason for disbelieving it.’

‘I see every reason, until I have your evidence.’

This was not at all Marian’s natural tone in argument with him. She was wont to be submissive.

‘I was told,’ he continued, hardening face and voice, ‘by someone who had it from Jedwood.’

Yule was conscious of untruth in this statement, but his mood would not allow him to speak ingenuously, and he wished to note the effect upon Marian of what he said. There were two beliefs in him: on the one hand, he recognised Fadge in every line of the writing; on the other, he had a perverse satisfaction in convincing himself that it was Milvain who had caught so successfully the master’s manner. He was not the kind of man who can resist an opportunity of justifying, to himself and others, a course into which he has been led by mingled feelings, all more or less unjustifiable.

‘How should Jedwood know?’ asked Marian.

Yule shrugged his shoulders.

‘As if these things didn’t get about among editors and publishers!’

‘In this case, there’s a mistake.’

‘And why, pray?’ His voice trembled with choler. ‘Why need there be a mistake?’

‘Because Mr. Milvain is quite incapable of reviewing your book in such a spirit.’

‘There is *your* mistake, my girl. Milvain will do anything that’s asked of him, provided he’s well enough paid.’

Marian reflected. When she raised her eyes again they were perfectly calm.

‘What has led you to think that?’

‘Don’t I know the type of man? *Noscitur ex sociis*—have you Latin enough for that?’

‘You’ll find that you are misinformed,’ Marian replied, and therewith went from the room.

She could not trust herself to converse longer. A resentment such as her father had never yet excited in her—such, indeed, as she had seldom, if ever, conceived—threatened to force utterance for itself in words which would change the current of her whole life. She saw her father in his worst aspect, and her heart was shaken by an unnatural revolt from him. Let his assurance of what he reported be ever so firm, what right had he to make this use of it? His behaviour was spiteful. Suppose he

entertained suspicions which seemed to make it his duty to warn her against Milvain, *this* was not the way to go about it. A father actuated by simple motives of affection would never speak and look thus.

It was the hateful spirit of literary rancour that ruled him; the spirit that made people eager to believe all evil, that blinded and maddened. Never had she felt so strongly the unworthiness of the existence to which she was condemned. That contemptible review, and now her father's ignoble passion—such things were enough to make all literature appear a morbid excrescence upon human life.

Forgetful of the time, she sat in her bedroom until a knock at the door, and her mother's voice, admonished her that dinner was waiting. An impulse all but caused her to say that she would rather not go down for the meal, that she wished to be left alone. But this would be weak peevishness. She just looked at the glass to see that her face bore no unwonted signs, and descended to take her place as usual.

Throughout the dinner there passed no word of conversation. Yule was at his blackest; he gobbled a few mouthfuls, then occupied himself

with the evening paper. On rising, he said to Marian :

‘Have you copied the whole of that?’

The tone would have been uncivil if addressed to an impertinent servant.

‘Not much more than half,’ was the cold reply.

‘Can you finish it to-night?’

‘I’m afraid not. I am going out.’

‘Then I must do it myself.’

And he went to the study.

Mrs. Yule was in an anguish of nervousness.

‘What is it, dear?’ she asked of Marian, in a pleading whisper. ‘Oh, don’t quarrel with your father! Don’t!’

‘I can’t be a slave, mother, and I can’t be treated unjustly.’

‘What is it? Let me go and speak to him.’

‘It’s no use. We *can’t* live in terror.’

For Mrs. Yule this was unimaginable disaster. She had never dreamt that Marian, the still, gentle Marian, could be driven to revolt. And it had come with the suddenness of a thunder-clap. She wished to ask what had taken place between father and daughter in the brief inter-

view before dinner ; but Marian gave her no chance, quitting the room upon those last trembling words.

The girl had resolved to visit her friends, the sisters, and tell them that in future they must never come to see her at home. But it was no easy thing for her to stifle her conscience, and leave her father to toil over that copying which had need of being finished. Not her will, but her exasperated feeling, had replied to him that she would not do the work ; already it astonished her that she had really spoken such words. And as the throbbing of her pulses subsided, she saw more clearly into the motives of this wretched tumult which possessed her. Her mind was harassed with a fear lest in defending Milvain she had spoken foolishly. Had he not himself said to her that he might be guilty of base things, just to make his way ? Perhaps it was the intolerable pain of imagining that he had already made good his words, which robbed her of self-control and made her meet her father's rudeness with defiance.

Impossible to carry out her purpose ; she could not deliberately leave the house and spend some hours away with the thought of such wrath and misery left behind her. Gradually

she was returning to her natural self; fear and penitence were chill at her heart.

She went down to the study, tapped, and entered.

‘Father, I said something that I did not really mean. Of course I shall go on with the copying and finish it as soon as possible.’

‘You will do nothing of the kind, my girl.’ He was in his usual place, already working at Marian’s task; he spoke in a low, thick voice. ‘Spend your evening as you choose, I have no need of you.’

‘I behaved very ill-temperedly. Forgive me, father.’

‘Have the goodness to go away. You hear me?’

His eyes were inflamed, and his discoloured teeth showed themselves savagely. Marian durst not, really durst not approach him. She hesitated, but once more a sense of hateful injustice moved within her, and she went away as quietly as she had entered.

She said to herself that now it was her perfect right to go whither she would. But the freedom was only in theory; her submissive and timid nature kept her at home—and upstairs in her own room: for, if she went to sit with her

mother, of necessity she must talk about what had happened, and that she felt unable to do. Some friend to whom she could unbosom all her sufferings would now have been very precious to her, but Maud and Dora were her only intimates, and to them she might not make the full confession which gives solace.

Mrs. Yule did not venture to intrude upon her daughter's privacy. That Marian neither went out nor showed herself in the house proved her troubled state, but the mother had no confidence in her power to comfort. At the usual time she presented herself in the study with her husband's coffee; the face which was for an instant turned to her did not invite conversation, but distress obliged her to speak.

‘Why are you cross with Marian, Alfred?’

‘You had better ask what she means by her extraordinary behaviour.’

A word of harsh rebuff was the most she had expected. Thus encouraged, she timidly put another question.

‘How has she behaved?’

‘I suppose you have ears?’

‘But wasn't there something before that? You spoke so angry to her.’

‘Spoke so angry, did I? She is out, I suppose?’

‘No, she hasn’t gone out.’

‘That’ll do. Don’t disturb me any longer.’

She did not venture to linger.

The breakfast next morning seemed likely to pass without any interchange of words. But when Yule was pushing back his chair, Marian—who looked pale and ill—addressed a question to him about the work she would ordinarily have pursued to-day at the Reading-room. He answered in a matter-of-fact tone, and for a few minutes they talked on the subject much as at any other time. Half an hour after, Marian set forth for the Museum in the usual way. Her father stayed at home.

It was the end of the episode for the present. Marian felt that the best thing would be to ignore what had happened, as her father evidently purposed doing. She had asked his forgiveness, and it was harsh in him to have repelled her; but by now she was able once more to take into consideration all his trials and toils, his embittered temper and the new wound he had received. That he should resume his wonted manner was sufficient evidence of regret on his part. Gladly she would have unsaid her resent-

ful words ; she had been guilty of a childish outburst of temper, and perhaps had prepared worse sufferings for the future.

And yet, perhaps it was as well that her father should be warned. She was not all submission, he might try her beyond endurance ; there might come a day when perforce she must stand face to face with him, and make it known she had her own claims upon life. It was as well he should hold that possibility in view.

This evening no work was expected of her. Not long after dinner she prepared for going out ; to her mother she mentioned she should be back about ten o'clock.

‘Give my kind regards to them, dear—if you like to,’ said Mrs. Yule just above her breath.

‘Certainly I will.’

CHAPTER XIV

RECRUITS

MARIAN walked to the nearest point of Camden Road, and there waited for an omnibus, which conveyed her to within easy reach of the street where Maud and Dora Milvain had their lodgings. This was at the north-east of Regent's Park, and no great distance from Mornington Road, where Jasper still dwelt.

On learning that the young ladies were at home and alone, she ascended to the second floor and knocked.

‘That’s right!’ exclaimed Dora’s pleasant voice, as the door opened and the visitor showed herself. And then came the friendly greeting which warmed Marian’s heart, the greeting which until lately no house in London could afford her.

The girls looked oddly out of place in this second-floor sitting-room, with its vulgar furniture and paltry ornaments. Maud especially so,

for her fine figure was well displayed by the dress of mourning, and her pale, handsome face had as little congruence as possible with a background of humble circumstances. Dora impressed one as a simpler nature, but she too had distinctly the note of refinement which was out of harmony with these surroundings. They occupied only two rooms, the sleeping-chamber being double-bedded; they purchased food for themselves and prepared their own meals, excepting dinner. During the first week a good many tears were shed by both of them; it was not easy to transfer themselves from the comfortable country home to this bare corner of lodgers' London. Maud, as appeared at the first glance, was less disposed than her sister to make the best of things; her countenance wore an expression rather of discontent than of sorrow, and she did not talk with the same readiness as Dora.

On the round table lay a number of books; when disturbed, the sisters had been engaged in studious reading.

‘I’m not sure that I do right in coming again so soon,’ said Marian as she took off her things. ‘Your time is precious.’

‘So are you,’ replied Dora, laughing. ‘It’s

only under protest that we work in the evening when we have been hard at it all day.'

'We have news for you, too,' said Maud, who sat languidly on an uneasy chair.

'Good, I hope?'

'Someone called to see us yesterday. I dare say you can guess who it was.'

'Amy, perhaps?'

'Yes.'

'And how did you like her?'

The sisters seemed to have a difficulty in answering. Dora was the first to speak.

'We thought she was sadly out of spirits. Indeed she told us that she hasn't been very well lately. But I think we shall like her if we come to know her better.'

'It was rather awkward, Marian,' the elder sister explained. 'We felt obliged to say something about Mr. Reardon's books, but we haven't read any of them yet, you know, so I just said that I hoped soon to read his new novel. "I suppose you have seen reviews of it?" she asked at once. Of course I ought to have had the courage to say no, but I admitted that I had seen one or two—Jasper showed us them. She looked very much annoyed, and after that we didn't find much to talk about.'

‘The reviews are very disagreeable,’ said Marian with a troubled face. ‘I have read the book since I saw you the other day, and I’m afraid it isn’t good, but I have seen many worse novels more kindly reviewed.’

‘Jasper says it’s because Mr. Reardon has no friends among the journalists.’

‘Still,’ replied Marian, ‘I’m afraid they couldn’t have given the book much praise, if they wrote honestly. Did Amy ask you to go and see her?’

‘Yes, but she said it was uncertain how long they would be living at their present address. And really we can’t feel sure whether we should be welcome or not just now.’

Marian listened with bent head. She too had to make known to her friends that they were not welcome in her own home; but she knew not how to utter words which would sound so unkind.

‘Your brother,’ she said after a pause, ‘will soon find suitable friends for you.’

‘Before long,’ replied Dora, with a look of amusement, ‘he’s going to take us to call on Mrs. Boston Wright. I hardly thought he was serious at first, but he says he really means it.’

Marian grew more and more silent. At home she had felt that it would not be difficult to explain her troubles to these sympathetic girls, but now the time had come for speaking, she was oppressed by shame and anxiety. True, there was no absolute necessity for making the confession this evening, and if she chose to resist her father's prejudice, things might even go on in a seemingly natural way. But the loneliness of her life had developed in her a sensitiveness which could not endure situations such as the present; difficulties which are of small account to people who take their part in active social life, harassed her to the destruction of all peace. Dora was not long in noticing the dejected mood which had come upon her friend.

‘What’s troubling you, Marian?’

‘Something I can hardly bear to speak of. Perhaps it will be the end of your friendship for me, and I should find it very hard to go back to my old solitude.’

The girls gazed at her, in doubt at first whether she spoke seriously.

‘What *can* you mean?’ Dora exclaimed.

‘What crime have you been committing?’

Maud, who leaned with her elbows on the

table, searched Marian's face curiously, but said nothing.

'Has Mr. Milvain shown you the new number of *The Current*?' Marian went on to ask.

They replied with a negative, and Maud added :

'He has nothing in it this month, except a review.'

'A review?' repeated Marian in a low voice.

'Yes ; of somebody's novel.'

'Markland's,' supplied Dora.

Marian drew a breath, but remained for a moment with her eyes cast down.

'Do go on, dear,' urged Dora. 'What ever are you going to tell us?'

'There's a notice of father's book,' continued the other, 'a very ill-natured one ; it's written by the editor, Mr. Fadge. Father and he have been very unfriendly for a long time. Perhaps Mr. Milvain has told you something about it?'

Dora replied that he had.

'I don't know how it is in other professions,' Marian resumed, 'but I hope there is less envy, hatred and malice than in this of ours. The name of literature is often made hateful to me

by the things I hear and read. My father has never been very fortunate, and many things have happened to make him bitter against the men who succeed ; he has often quarrelled with people who were at first his friends, but never so seriously with anyone as with Mr. Fadge. His feeling of enmity goes so far that it includes even those who are in any way associated with Mr. Fadge. I am sorry to say'—she looked with painful anxiety from one to the other of her hearers—'this has turned him against your brother, and——'

Her voice was checked by agitation.

'We were afraid of this,' said Dora, in a tone of sympathy.

'Jasper feared it might be the case,' added Maud, more coldly, though with friendliness.

'Why I speak of it at all,' Marian hastened to say, 'is because I am so afraid it should make a difference between yourselves and me.'

'Oh ! don't think that !' Dora exclaimed.

'I am so ashamed,' Marian went on in an uncertain tone, 'but I think it will be better if I don't ask you to come and see me. It sounds ridiculous ; it *is* ridiculous and shameful. I couldn't complain if you refused to have anything more to do with me.'

‘Don’t let it trouble you,’ urged Maud, with perhaps a trifle more of magnanimity in her voice than was needful. ‘We quite understand. Indeed, it shan’t make any difference to us.’

But Marian had averted her face, and could not meet these assurances with any show of pleasure. Now that the step was taken she felt that her behaviour had been very weak. Unreasonable harshness such as her father’s ought to have been met more steadily; she had no right to make it an excuse for such incivility to her friends. Yet only in some such way as this could she make known to Jasper Milvain how her father regarded him, which she felt it necessary to do. Now his sisters would tell him, and henceforth there would be a clear understanding on both sides. That state of things was painful to her, but it was better than ambiguous relations.

‘Jasper is very sorry about it,’ said Dora, glancing rapidly at Marian.

‘But his connection with Mr. Fadge came about in such a natural way,’ added the eldest sister. ‘And it was impossible for him to refuse opportunities.’

‘Impossible; I know,’ Marian replied earnestly. ‘Don’t think that I wish to justify

my father. But I can understand him, and it must be very difficult for you to do so. You can't know, as I do, how intensely he has suffered in these wretched, ignoble quarrels. If only you will let me come here still, in the same way, and still be as friendly to me. My home has never been a place to which I could have invited friends with any comfort, even if I had had any to invite. There were always reasons—but I can't speak of them.'

'My dear Marian,' appealed Dora, 'don't distress yourself so! Do believe that nothing whatever has happened to change our feeling to you. Has there, Maud?'

'Nothing whatever. We are not unreasonable girls, Marian.'

'I am more grateful to you than I can say.'

It had seemed as if Marian must give way to the emotions which all but choked her voice; she overcame them, however, and presently was able to talk in pretty much her usual way, though when she smiled it was but faintly. Maud tried to lead her thoughts in another direction by speaking of work in which she and Dora were engaged. Already the sisters were doing a new piece of compilation for Messrs. Jolly and Monk; it was more exacting than

their initial task for the book-market, and would take a much longer time.

A couple of hours went by, and Marian had just spoken of taking her leave, when a man's step was heard rapidly ascending the nearest flight of stairs.

'Here's Jasper,' remarked Dora, and in a moment there sounded a short, sharp summons at the door.

Jasper it was; he came in with radiant face, his eyes blinking before the lamp-light.

'Well, girls! Ha! how do you do, Miss Yule? I had just the vaguest sort of expectation that you might be here. It seemed a likely night; I don't know why. I say, Dora, we really must get two or three decent easy-chairs for your room. I've seen some outside a second-hand furniture shop in Hampstead Road, about six shillings apiece. There's no sitting on chairs such as these.'

That on which he tried to dispose himself, when he had flung aside his trappings, creaked and shivered ominously.

'You hear? I shall come plump on to the floor, if I don't mind. My word, what a day I have had! I've just been trying what I really could do in one day if I worked my hardest.'

Now just listen ; it deserves to be chronicled for the encouragement of aspiring youth. I got up at 7.30, and whilst I breakfasted I read through a volume I had to review. By 10.30 the review was written—three-quarters of a column of the *Evening Budget*.’

‘Who is the unfortunate author?’ interrupted Maud, caustically.

‘Not unfortunate at all. I had to crack him up ; otherwise I couldn’t have done the job so quickly. It’s the easiest thing in the world to write laudation ; only an inexperienced grumbler would declare it was easier to find fault. The book was Billington’s “Vagaries” ; pompous idiocy, of course, but he lives in a big house and gives dinners. Well, from 10.30 to 11, I smoked a cigar and reflected, feeling that the day wasn’t badly begun. At eleven, I was ready to write my Saturday *causerie* for the *Will o’ the Wisp* ; it took me till close upon one o’clock, which was rather too long. I can’t afford more than an hour and a half for that job. At one, I rushed out to a dirty little eating-house in Hampstead Road. Was back again by a quarter to two, having in the meantime sketched a paper for *The West End*. Pipe in mouth, I sat down to leisurely artistic work ; by five, half the

paper was done ; the other half remains for to-morrow. From five to half-past I read four newspapers and two magazines, and from half-past to a quarter to six I jotted down several ideas that had come to me whilst reading. At six I was again in the dirty eating-house, satisfying a ferocious hunger. Home once more at 6.45, and for two hours wrote steadily at a long affair I have in hand for *The Current*. Then I came here, thinking hard all the way. What say you to this? Have I earned a night's repose?'

'And what's the value of it all?' asked Maud.

'Probably from ten to twelve guineas, if I calculated.'

'I meant, what was the literary value of it,' said his sister, with a smile.

'Equal to that of the contents of a mouldy nut.'

'Pretty much what I thought.'

'Oh, but it answers the purpose,' urged Dora, 'and it does no one any harm.'

'Honest journey-work!' cried Jasper. ['There are few men in London capable of such a feat. Many a fellow could write more in quantity, but they couldn't command my market. It's rub-

bish, but rubbish of a very special kind, of fine quality.')

Marian had not yet spoken, save a word or two in reply to Jasper's greeting; now and then she just glanced at him, but for the most part her eyes were cast down. Now Jasper addressed her.

'A year ago, Miss Yule, I shouldn't have believed myself capable of such activity. In fact, I wasn't capable of it then.'

'You think such work won't be too great a strain upon you?' she asked.

'Oh, this isn't a specimen day, you know. To-morrow I shall very likely do nothing but finish my *West End* article, in an easy two or three hours. There's no knowing; I might perhaps keep up the high pressure if I tried. But then I couldn't dispose of all the work. Little by little—or perhaps rather quicker than that—I shall extend my scope. For instance, I should like to do two or three leaders a week for one of the big dailies. I can't attain unto that just yet.'

'Not political leaders?'

'By no means. That's not my line. The kind of thing in which one makes a column out of what would fill six lines of respectable prose.

You call a cigar a "convoluted weed," and so on, you know; that passes for facetiousness. I've never really tried my hand at that style yet; I shouldn't wonder if I managed it brilliantly. Some day I'll write a few exercises; just take two lines of some good prose-writer, and expand them into twenty, in half a dozen different ways. Excellent mental gymnastics!'

Marian listened to his flow of talk for a few minutes longer, then took the opportunity of a brief silence to rise and put on her hat. Jasper observed her, but without rising; he looked at his sisters in a hesitating way. At length he stood up, and declared that he too must be off. This coincidence had happened once before when he met Marian here in the evening.

'At all events, you won't do any more work to-night,' said Dora.

'No; I shall read a page of something or other over a glass of whisky, and seek the sleep of a man who has done his duty.'

'Why the whisky?' asked Maud.

'Do you grudge me such poor solace?'

'I don't see the need of it.'

'Nonsense, Maud!' exclaimed her sister. 'He needs a little stimulant when he works so hard.'

Each of the girls gave Marian's hand a significant pressure as she took leave of them, and begged her to come again as soon as she had a free evening. There was gratitude in her eyes.

The evening was clear, and not very cold.

'It's rather late for you to go home,' said Jasper, as they left the house. 'May I walk part of the way with you?'

Marian replied with a low 'Thank you.'

'I think you get on pretty well with the girls, don't you?'

'I hope they are as glad of my friendship as I am of theirs.'

'Pity to see them in a place like that, isn't it? They ought to have a good house, with plenty of servants. It's bad enough for a civilised man to have to rough it, but I hate to see women living in a sordid way. Don't you think they could both play their part in a drawing-room, with a little experience?'

'Surely there's no doubt of it.'

'Maud would look really superb if she were handsomely dressed. She hasn't a common face, by any means. And Dora is pretty, I think. Well, they shall go and see some people before long. The difficulty is, one doesn't like it to be known that they live in such a crib;

but I daren't advise them to go in for expense. One can't be sure that it would repay them, though—— Now, in my own case, if I could get hold of a few thousand pounds I should know how to use it with the certainty of return; it would save me, probably, a clear ten years of life; I mean, I should go at a jump to what I shall be ten years hence without the help of money. But they have such a miserable little bit of capital, and everything is still so uncertain. One daren't speculate under the circumstances.'

Marian made no reply.

'You think I talk of nothing but money?' Jasper said suddenly, looking down into her face.

'I know too well what it means to be without money.'

'Yes, but—you do just a little despise me?'

'Indeed, I don't, Mr. Milvain.'

'If that is sincere, I'm very glad. I take it in a friendly sense. I *am* rather despicable, you know; it's part of my business to be so. But a friend needn't regard that. There is the man apart from his necessities.'

The silence was then unbroken till they came to the lower end of Park Street, the junction of

roads which lead to Hampstead, to Highgate, and to Holloway.

‘Shall you take an omnibus?’ Jasper asked. She hesitated.

‘Or will you give me the pleasure of walking on with you? You are tired, perhaps?’

‘Not the least.’

For the rest of her answer she moved forward, and they crossed into the obscurity of Camden Road.

‘Shall I be doing wrong, Mr. Milvain,’ Marian began in a very low voice, ‘if I ask you about the authorship of something in this month’s *Current*?’

‘I’m afraid I know what you refer to. There’s no reason why I shouldn’t answer a question of the kind.’

‘It was Mr. Fadge himself who reviewed my father’s book?’

‘It was—confound him! I don’t know another man who could have done the thing so vilely well.’

‘I suppose he was only replying to my father’s attack upon him and his friends.’

‘Your father’s attack is honest and straightforward and justifiable and well put. I read that chapter of his book with huge satisfaction.

But has anyone suggested that another than Fadge was capable of that masterpiece?’

‘Yes. I am told that Mr. Jedwood, the publisher, has somehow made a mistake.’

‘Jedwood? And what mistake?’

‘Father heard that you were the writer.’

‘I?’ Jasper stopped short. They were in the rays of a street-lamp, and could see each other’s faces. ‘And he believes that?’

‘I’m afraid so.’

‘And *you* believe—believed it?’

‘Not for a moment.’

‘I shall write a note to Mr. Yule.’

Marian was silent a while, then said :

‘Wouldn’t it be better if you found a way of letting Mr. Jedwood know the truth?’

‘Perhaps you are right.’

Jasper was very grateful for the suggestion. In that moment he had reflected how rash it would be to write to Alfred Yule on such a subject, with whatever prudence in expressing himself. Such a letter, coming under the notice of the great Fadge, might do its writer serious harm.

‘Yes, you are right,’ he repeated. ‘I’ll stop that rumour at its source. I can’t guess how it started; for aught I know, some enemy hath

done this, though I don't quite discern the motive. Thank you very much for telling me, and still more for refusing to believe that I could treat Mr. Yule in that way, even as a matter of business. When I said that I was despicable, I didn't mean that I could sink quite to such a point as that. If only because it was your father——'

He checked himself, and they walked on for several yards without speaking.

'In that case,' Jasper resumed at length, 'your father doesn't think of me in a very friendly way?'

'He scarcely could——'

'No, no. And I quite understand that the mere fact of my working for Fadge would prejudice him against me. But that's no reason, I hope, why you and I shouldn't be friends?'

'I hope not.'

'I don't know that my friendship is worth much,' Jasper continued, talking into the upper air, a habit of his when he discussed his own character. 'I shall go on as I have begun, and fight for some of the good things of life. But *your* friendship is valuable. If I am sure of it, I shall be at all events within sight of the better ideals.'

Marian walked on with her eyes upon the ground. To her surprise she discovered presently that they had all but reached St. Paul's Crescent.

‘Thank you for having come so far,’ she said pausing.

‘Ah, you are nearly home. Why, it seems only a few minutes since we left the girls. Now I'll run back to the whisky of which Maud disapproves.’

‘May it do you good!’ said Marian with a laugh.

A speech of this kind seemed unusual upon her lips. Jasper smiled as he held her hand and regarded her.

‘Then you *can* speak in a joking way?’

‘Do I seem so very dull?’

‘Dull, by no means. But sage and sober and reticent—and exactly what I like in my friend, because it contrasts with my own habits. All the better that merriment lies below it. Good-night, Miss Yule.’

He strode off, and in a minute or two turned his head to look at the slight figure passing into darkness.

Marian's hand trembled as she tried to insert her latch-key. When she had closed the door

very quietly behind her she went to the sitting-room; Mrs. Yule was just laying aside the sewing on which she had occupied herself throughout the lonely evening.

‘I’m rather late,’ said the girl, in a voice of subdued joyousness.

‘Yes; I was getting a little uneasy, dear.’

‘Oh, there’s no danger.’

‘You have been enjoying yourself, I can see.’

‘I have had a pleasant evening.’

In the retrospect it seemed the pleasantest she had yet spent with her friends, though she had set out in such a different mood. Her mind was relieved of two anxieties; she felt sure that the girls had not taken ill what she told them, and there was no longer the least doubt concerning the authorship of that review in *The Current*.

She could confess to herself now that the assurance from Jasper’s lips was not superfluous. He *might* have weighed profit against other considerations, and have written in that way of her father; she had not felt that absolute confidence which defies every argument from human frailty. And now she asked herself if faith of that unassailable kind is ever possible; is it not only the poet’s dream, the far ideal?

Marian often went thus far in her speculation. Her candour was allied with clear insight into the possibilities of falsehood; she was not readily the victim of illusion; thinking much, and speaking little, she had not come to her twenty-third year without perceiving what a distance lay between a girl's dream of life as it might be and life as it is. Had she invariably disclosed her thoughts, she would have earned the repute of a very sceptical and slightly cynical person.

But with what rapturous tumult of the heart she could abandon herself to a belief in human virtues when their suggestion seemed to promise her a future of happiness!

Alone in her room she sat down only to think of Jasper Milvain, and extract from the memory of his words, his looks, new sustenance for her hungry heart. Jasper was the first man who had ever evinced a man's interest in her. Until she met him she had not known a look of compliment or a word addressed to her emotions. He was as far as possible from representing the lover of her imagination, but from the day of that long talk in the fields near Wattleborough the thought of him had supplanted dreams. On that day she said to herself: I

could love him if he cared to seek my love. Premature, perhaps; why yes, but one who is starving is not wont to feel reluctance at the suggestion of food. The first man who had approached her with display of feeling and energy and youthful self-confidence; handsome too, it seemed to her. Her womanhood went eagerly to meet him.

Since then she had made careful study of his faults. Each conversation had revealed to her new weakness and follies. With the result that her love had grown to a reality.

He was so human, and a youth of all but monastic seclusion had prepared her to love the man who aimed with frank energy at the joys of life. A taint of pedantry would have repelled her. She did not ask for high intellect or great attainments; but vivacity, courage, determination to succeed were delightful to her senses. Her ideal would not have been a literary man at all; certainly not a man likely to be prominent in journalism; rather a man of action, one who had no restraints of commerce or official routine. But in Jasper she saw the qualities that attracted her apart from the accidents of his position. Ideal personages do not descend to girls who have to labour at the British Museum; it seemed

a marvel to her, and of good augury, that even such a man as Jasper should have crossed her path.

It was as though years had passed since their first meeting. Upon her return to London had followed such long periods of hopelessness. Yet whenever they encountered each other he had look and speech for her with which surely he did not greet every woman. From the first his way of regarding her had shown frank interest. And at length had come the confession of his 'respect,' his desire to be something more to her than a mere acquaintance. It was scarcely possible that he should speak as he several times had of late if he did not wish to draw her towards him.

That was the hopeful side of her thoughts. It was easy to forget for a time those words of his which one might think were spoken as distinct warning; but they crept into the memory, unwelcome, importunate, as soon as imagination had built its palace of joy. Why did he always recur to the subject of money? 'I shall allow nothing to come in my way;' he once said that as if meaning, 'certainly not a love affair with a girl who is penniless.' He emphasised the

word 'friend,' as if to explain that he offered and asked nothing more than friendship.

But it only meant that he would not be in haste to declare himself. Of a certainty there was conflict between his ambition and his love, but she recognised her power over him and exulted in it. She had observed his hesitancy this evening, before he rose to accompany her from the house; her heart laughed within her as the desire drew him. And henceforth such meetings would be frequent, with each one her influence would increase. How kindly fate had dealt with her in bringing Maud and Dora to London!

It was within his reach to marry a woman who would bring him wealth. He had that in mind; she understood it too well. But not one moment's advantage would she relinquish. He must choose her in her poverty, and be content with what his talents could earn for him. Her love gave her the right to demand this sacrifice; let him ask for her love, and the sacrifice would no longer seem one, so passionately would she reward him.

He would ask it. To-night she was full of a rich confidence, partly, no doubt, the result of reaction from her miseries. He had said at

parting that her character was so well suited to his; that he liked her. And then he had pressed her hand so warmly. Before long he would ask her love.

The unhoped was all but granted her. She could labour on in the valley of the shadow of books, for a ray of dazzling sunshine might at any moment strike into its musty gloom.

CHAPTER XV

THE LAST RESOURCE

THE past twelve months had added several years to Edwin Reardon's seeming age ; at thirty-three he would generally have been taken for forty. His bearing, his personal habits, were no longer those of a young man ; he walked with a stoop and pressed noticeably on the stick he carried ; it was rare for him to show the countenance which tells of present cheerfulness or glad onward-looking ; there was no spring in his step ; his voice had fallen to a lower key, and often he spoke with that hesitation in choice of words which may be noticed in persons whom defeat has made self-distrustful. Ceaseless perplexity and dread gave a wandering, sometimes a wild, expression to his eyes.

He seldom slept, in the proper sense of the word ; as a rule, he was conscious all through the night of ' a kind of fighting ' between physical weariness and wakeful toil of the mind. It

often happened that some wholly imaginary obstacle in the story he was writing kept him under a sense of effort throughout the dark hours; now and again he woke, reasoned with himself, and remembered clearly that the torment was without cause, but the short relief thus afforded soon passed in the recollection of real distress. In his unsoothing slumber he talked aloud, frequently wakening Amy; generally he seemed to be holding a dialogue with someone who had imposed an intolerable task upon him; he protested passionately, appealed, argued in the strangest way about the injustice of what was demanded. Once Amy heard him begging for money—positively begging, like some poor wretch in the street; it was horrible, and made her shed tears; when he asked what he had been saying, she could not bring herself to tell him.

When the striking clocks summoned him remorselessly to rise and work he often reeled with dizziness. It seemed to him that the greatest happiness attainable would be to creep into some dark, warm corner, out of the sight and memory of men, and lie there torpid, with a blessed half-consciousness that death was slowly overcoming him. Of all the sufferings collected

into each four-and-twenty hours this of rising to a new day was the worst.

The one-volume story which he had calculated would take him four or five weeks was with difficulty finished in two months. March winds made an invalid of him; at one time he was threatened with bronchitis, and for several days had to abandon even the effort to work. In previous winters he had been wont to undergo a good deal of martyrdom from the London climate, but never in such a degree as now; mental illness seemed to have enfeebled his body.

It was strange that he succeeded in doing work of any kind, for he had no hope from the result. This one last effort he would make, just to complete the undeniableness of his failure, and then literature should be thrown behind him; what other pursuit was possible to him he knew not, but perhaps he might discover some mode of earning a livelihood. Had it been a question of gaining a pound a week, as in the old days, he might have hoped to obtain some clerkship like that at the hospital, where no commercial experience or aptitude was demanded; but in his present position such an income would be useless. Could he take Amy

and the child to live in a garret? On less than a hundred a year it was scarcely possible to maintain outward decency. Already his own clothing began to declare him poverty-stricken, and but for gifts from her mother Amy would have reached the like pass. They lived in dread of the pettiest casual expense, for the day of pennilessness was again approaching.

Amy was oftener from home than had been her custom. Occasionally she went away soon after breakfast, and spent the whole day at her mother's house. 'It saves food,' she said with a bitter laugh, when Reardon once expressed surprise that she should be going again so soon.

'And gives you an opportunity of bewailing your hard fate,' he returned coldly.

The reproach was ignoble, and he could not be surprised that Amy left the house without another word to him. Yet he resented that, as he had resented her sorrowful jest. The feeling of unmanliness in his own position tortured him into a mood of perversity. Through the day he wrote only a few lines, and on Amy's return he resolved not to speak to her. There was a sense of repose in this change of attitude; he encouraged himself in the view that Amy was treating him with cruel neglect. She, sur-

prised that her friendly questions elicited no answer, looked into his face and saw a sullen anger of which hitherto Reardon had never seemed capable. Her indignation took fire, and she left him to himself.

For a day or two he persevered in his muteness, uttering a word only when it could not be avoided. Amy was at first so resentful that she contemplated leaving him to his ill-temper and dwelling at her mother's house until he chose to recall her. But his face grew so haggard in fixed misery that compassion at length prevailed over her injured pride. Late in the evening she went to the study, and found him sitting unoccupied.

‘Edwin——’

‘What do you want?’ he asked indifferently.

‘Why are you behaving to me like this?’

‘Surely it makes no difference to you how I behave? You can easily forget that I exist, and live your own life.’

‘What have I done to make this change in you?’

‘Is it a change?’

‘You know it is.’

‘How did I behave before?’ he asked, glancing at her.

‘Like yourself—kindly and gently.’

‘If I always did so, in spite of things that might have embittered another man’s temper, I think it deserved some return of kindness from you.’

‘What “things” do you mean?’

‘Circumstances for which neither of us is to blame.’

‘I am not conscious of having failed in kindness,’ said Amy, distantly.

‘Then that only shows that you have forgotten your old self, and utterly changed in your feeling to me. When we first came to live here could you have imagined yourself leaving me alone for long, miserable days, just because I was suffering under misfortunes? You have shown too plainly that you don’t care to give me the help even of a kind word. You get away from me as often as you can, as if to remind me that we have no longer any interests in common. Other people are your confidants; you speak of me to them as if I were purposely dragging you down into a mean condition.’

‘How can you know what I say about you?’

‘Isn’t it true?’ he asked, flashing an angry glance at her.

‘It is not true. Of course I have talked to

mother about our difficulties ; how could I help it ? ’

‘ And to other people. ’

‘ Not in a way that you could find fault with. ’

‘ In a way that makes me seem contemptible to them. You show them that I have made you poor and unhappy, and you are glad to have their sympathy. ’

‘ What you mean is, that I oughtn’t to see anyone. There’s no other way of avoiding such a reproach as this. So long as I don’t laugh and sing before people, and assure them that things couldn’t be more hopeful, I shall be asking for their sympathy, and against you. I can’t understand your unreasonableness. ’

‘ I’m afraid there is very little in me that you can understand. So long as my prospects seemed bright, you could sympathise readily enough ; as soon as ever they darkened, something came between us. Amy, you haven’t done your duty. Your love hasn’t stood the test as it should have done. You have given me no help ; besides the burden of cheerless work I have had to bear that of your growing coldness. I can’t remember one instance when you have spoken to me as a wife might—a wife who was something more than a man’s housekeeper. ’

The passion in his voice and the harshness of the accusation made her unable to reply.

‘You said rightly,’ he went on, ‘that I have always been kind and gentle. I never thought I could speak to you, or feel to you, in any other way. But I have undergone too much, and you have deserted me. Surely it was too soon to do that. So long as I endeavoured my utmost, and loved you the same as ever, you might have remembered all you once said to me. You might have given me help, but you haven’t cared to.’

The impulses which had part in this outbreak were numerous and complex. He felt all that he expressed, but at the same time it seemed to him that he had the choice between two ways of uttering his emotion, the tenderly appealing and the sternly reproachful; he took the latter course because it was less natural to him than the former. His desire was to impress Amy with the bitter intensity of his sufferings; pathos and loving words seemed to have lost their power upon her, but perhaps if he yielded to that other form of passion she would be shaken out of her coldness. The stress of injured love is always tempted to speech which seems its contradiction. Reardon had the strangest mixture of pain and pleasure in flinging out these first words of wrath

that he had ever addressed to Amy; they consoled him under the humiliating sense of his weakness, and yet he watched with dread his wife's countenance as she listened to him. He hoped to cause her pain equal to his own, for then it would be in his power at once to throw off this disguise, and soothe her with every softest word his heart could suggest. That she had really ceased to love him he could not, durst not, believe; but his nature demanded frequent assurance of affection. Amy had abandoned too soon the caresses of their ardent time; she was absorbed in her maternity, and thought it enough to be her husband's friend. Ashamed to make appeal directly for the tenderness she no longer offered, he accused her of utter indifference, of abandoning him and all but betraying him, that in self-defence she might show what really was in her heart.

But Amy made no movement towards him.

‘How can you say that I have deserted you?’ she returned, with cold indignation. ‘When did I refuse to share your poverty? When did I grumble at what we have had to go through?’

‘Ever since the troubles really began you have let me know what your thoughts were, even if you didn't speak them. You have never

shared my lot willingly. I can't recall one word of encouragement from you, but many, many which made the struggle harder for me.'

'Then it would be better for you if I went away altogether, and left you free to do the best for yourself. If that is what you mean by all this, why not say it plainly? I won't be a burden to you. Someone will give me a home.'

'And you would leave me without regret? Your only care would be that you were still bound to me?'

'You must think of me what you like. I don't care to defend myself.'

'You won't admit, then, that I have anything to complain of? I seem to you simply in a bad temper without a cause?'

'To tell you the truth, that's just what I do think. I came here to ask what I had done that you were angry with me, and you break out furiously with all sorts of vague reproaches. You have much to endure, I know that, but it's no reason why you should turn against me. I have never neglected my duty. Is the duty all on my side? I believe there are very few wives who would be as patient as I have been.'

Reardon gazed at her for a moment, then turned away. The distance between them was

greater than he had thought, and now he repented of having given way to an impulse so alien to his true feelings; anger only estranged her, whereas by speech of a different kind he might have won the caress for which he hungered.

Amy, seeing that he would say nothing more, left him to himself.

It grew late in the night. The fire had gone out, but Reardon still sat in the cold room. Thoughts of self-destruction were again haunting him, as they had done during the black months of last year. If he had lost Amy's love, and all through the mental impotence which would make it hard for him even to earn bread, why should he still live? Affection for his child had no weight with him; it was Amy's child rather than his, and he had more fear than pleasure in the prospect of Willie's growing to manhood.

He had just heard the workhouse clock strike two when, without the warning of a footstep, the door opened. Amy came in; she wore her dressing-gown, and her hair was arranged for the night.

'Why do you stay here?' she asked.

It was not the same voice as before. He saw that her eyes were red and swollen.

'Have you been crying, Amy?'

‘Never mind. Do you know what time it is?’

He went towards her. •

‘Why have you been crying?’

‘There are many things to cry for.’

‘Amy, have you any love for me still, or has poverty robbed me of it all?’

‘I have never said that I didn’t love you. Why do you accuse me of such things?’

He took her in his arms and held her passionately and kissed her face again and again. Amy’s tears broke forth anew.

‘Why should we come to such utter ruin?’ she sobbed. ‘Oh, try, try if you can’t save us even yet! You know without my saying it that I do love you; it’s dreadful to me to think all our happy life should be at an end, when we thought of such a future together. Is it impossible? Can’t you work as you used to and succeed as we felt confident you would? Don’t despair yet, Edwin; do, do try, whilst there’s still time!’

‘Darling, darling—if only I *could*!’

‘I have thought of something, dearest. Do as you proposed last year; find a tenant for the flat whilst we still have a little money, and then go away into some quiet country place, where you can get back your health and live for very

little, and write another book—a good book, that'll bring you reputation again. I and Willie can go and live at mother's for the summer months. Do this! It would cost you so little, living alone, wouldn't it? You would know that I was well cared for; mother would be willing to have me for a few months, and it's easy to explain that your health has failed, that you're obliged to go away for a time.'

'But why shouldn't you go with me, if we are to let this place?'

'We shouldn't have enough money. I want to free your mind from the burden whilst you are writing. And what is before us if we go on in this way? You don't think you will get much for what you're writing now, do you?'

Reardon shook his head.

'Then how can we live even to the end of the year? Something *must* be done, you know. If we go into poor lodgings, what hope is there that you'll be able to write anything good?'

'But, Amy, I have no faith in my power of——'

'Oh, it would be different! A few days—a week or a fortnight of real holiday in this spring weather. Go to some seaside place. How is it possible that all your talents should have left

you? It's only that you have been so anxious and in such poor health. You say I don't love you, but I have thought and thought what would be best for you to do, how you could save yourself. How can you sink down to the position of a poor clerk in some office? That *can't* be your fate, Edwin; it's incredible. Oh, after such bright hopes, make one more effort! Have you forgotten that we were to go to the South together—you were to take me to Italy and Greece? How can that ever be if you fail utterly in literature? How can you ever hope to earn more than bare sustenance at any other kind of work?'

He all but lost consciousness of her words in gazing at the face she held up to his.

'You love me? Say again that you love me!'

'Dear, I love you with all my heart. But I am so afraid of the future. I can't bear poverty; I have found that I can't bear it. And I dread to think of your becoming only an ordinary man——'

Reardon laughed.

'But I am *not* "only an ordinary man," Amy! If I never write another line, that won't undo what I have done. It's little enough, to be sure; but you know what I *am*. Do you

only love the author in me? Don't you think of me apart from all that I may do or not do? If I had to earn my living as a clerk, would that make me a clerk in soul?'

'You shall not fall to that! It would be too bitter a shame to lose all you have gained in these long years of work. Let me plan for you; do as I wish. You are to be what we hoped from the first. Take all the summer months. How long will it be before you can finish this short book?'

'A week or two.'

'Then finish it, and see what you can get for it. And try at once to find a tenant to take this place off our hands; that would be twenty-five pounds saved for the rest of the year. You could live on so little by yourself, couldn't you?'

'Oh, on ten shillings a week, if need be.'

'But not to starve yourself, you know. Don't you feel that my plan is a good one? When I came to you to-night I meant to speak of this, but you were so cruel——'

'Forgive me, dearest love! I was half a madman. You have been so cold to me for a long time.'

'I have been distracted. It was as if we

were drawing nearer and nearer to the edge of a cataract.'

'Have you spoken to your mother about this?' he asked uneasily.

'No—not exactly this. But I know she will help us in this way.'

He had seated himself, and was holding her in his arms, his face laid against hers.

'I shall dread to part from you, Amy. That's such a dangerous thing to do. It may mean that we are never to live as husband and wife again.'

'But how could it? It's just to prevent that danger. If we go on here till we have no money—what's before us then? Wretched lodgings at the best. And I am afraid to think of that. I can't trust myself if that should come to pass.'

'What do you mean?' he asked anxiously.

'I hate poverty so. It brings out all the worst things in me; you know I have told you that before, Edwin?'

'But you would never forget that you are my wife?'

'I hope not. But—I can't think of it; I can't face it! That would be the very worst that can befall us, and we are going to try our

utmost to escape from it. Was there ever a man who did as much as you have done in literature and then sank into hopeless poverty?’

‘Oh, many!’

‘But at your age, I mean. Surely not at your age?’

‘I’m afraid there have been such poor fellows. Think how often one hears of hopeful beginnings, new reputations, and then—you hear no more. Of course it generally means that the man has gone into a different career; but sometimes, sometimes——’

‘What?’

‘The abyss.’ He pointed downward. ‘Penury and despair and a miserable death.’

‘Oh, but those men haven’t a wife and child! They would struggle——’

‘Darling, they do struggle. But it’s as if an ever increasing weight were round their necks; it drags them lower and lower. The world has no pity on a man who can’t do or produce something it thinks worth money. You may be a divine poet, and if some good fellow doesn’t take pity on you you will starve by the roadside. Society is as blind and brutal as fate. I have no right to complain of my own ill-fortune; it’s my own fault (in a sense) that I can’t continue as

well as I began ; if I could write books as good as the early ones I should earn money. For all that, it's hard that I must be kicked aside as worthless just because I don't know a trade.'

'It shan't be ! I have only to look into your face to know that you will succeed after all. Yours is the kind of face that people come to know in portraits.'

He kissed her hair, and her eyes, and her mouth.

'How well I remember your saying that before ! Why have you grown so good to me all at once, my Amy ? Hearing you speak like that I feel there's nothing beyond my reach. But I dread to go away from you. If I find that it is hopeless ; if I am alone somewhere, and know that the effort is all vain——'

'Then ?'

'Well, I can leave you free. If I can't support you, it will be only just that I should give you back your freedom.'

'I don't understand——'

She raised herself, and looked into his eyes.

'We won't talk of that. If you bid me go on with the struggle, I shall do so.'

Amy had hidden her face, and lay silently in

his arms for a minute or two. Then she murmured :

‘It is so cold here, and so late. Come!’

‘So early. There goes three o’clock.’

The next day they talked much of this new project. As there was sunshine Amy accompanied her husband for his walk in the afternoon ; it was long since they had been out together. An open carriage that passed, followed by two young girls on horseback, gave a familiar direction to Reardon’s thoughts.

‘If one were as rich as those people ! They pass so close to us ; they see us, and we see them ; but the distance between is infinity. They don’t belong to the same world as we poor wretches. They see everything in a different light ; they have powers which would seem supernatural if we were suddenly endowed with them.’

‘Of course,’ assented his companion with a sigh.

‘Just fancy, if one got up in the morning with the thought that no reasonable desire that occurred to one throughout the day need remain ungratified ! And that it would be the same, any day and every day, to the end of

one's life! Look at those houses; every detail, within and without, luxurious. To have such a home as that!

‘And they are empty creatures who live there.’

‘They do *live*, Amy, at all events. Whatever may be their faculties, they all have free scope. I have often stood staring at houses like these until I couldn't believe that the people owning them were mere human beings like myself. The power of money is so hard to realise; one who has never had it marvels at the completeness with which it transforms every detail of life. Compare what we call our home with that of rich people; it moves one to scornful laughter. I have no sympathy with the stoical point of view; between wealth and poverty is just the difference between the whole man and the maimed. If my lower limbs are paralysed I may still be able to think, but then there is such a thing in life as walking. As a poor devil I may live nobly; but one happens to be made with faculties of enjoyment, and those have to fall into atrophy. To be sure, most rich people don't understand their happiness; if they did, they would move and talk like gods—which indeed they are.’

Amy's brow was shadowed. A wise man,

in Reardon's position, would not have chosen this subject to dilate upon.

'The difference,' he went on, 'between the man with money and the man without is simply this: the one thinks, "How shall I use my life?" and the other, "How shall I keep myself alive?" A physiologist ought to be able to discover some curious distinction between the brain of a person who has never given a thought to the means of subsistence, and that of one who has never known a day free from such cares. There must be some special cerebral development representing the mental anguish kept up by poverty.'

'I should say,' put in Amy, 'that it affects every function of the brain. It isn't a special point of suffering, but a misery that colours every thought.'

'True. Can I think of a single subject in all the sphere of my experience without the consciousness that I see it through the medium of poverty? I have no enjoyment which isn't tainted by that thought, and I can suffer no pain which it doesn't increase. The curse of poverty is to the modern world just what that of slavery was to the ancient. Rich and destitute stand to each other as free man and bond. You remember the line of Homer I have often

quoted about the demoralising effect of enslavement ; poverty degrades in the same way.'

'It has had its effect upon me—I know that too well,' said Amy, with bitter frankness.

Reardon glanced at her, and wished to make some reply, but he could not say what was in his thoughts.

He worked on at his story. Before he had reached the end of it, 'Margaret Home' was published, and one day arrived a parcel containing the six copies to which an author is traditionally entitled. Reardon was not so old in authorship that he could open the packet without a slight flutter of his pulse. The book was tastefully got up ; Amy exclaimed with pleasure as she caught sight of the cover and lettering.

'It may succeed, Edwin. It doesn't look like a book that fails, does it?'

She laughed at her own childishness. But Reardon had opened one of the volumes, and was glancing over the beginning of a chapter.

'Good God !' he cried. 'What hellish torment it was to write that page ! I did it one morning when the fog was so thick that I had to light the lamp. It brings cold sweat to my forehead to read the words. And to think that people will skim over it without a suspicion of

what it cost the writer!—What execrable style! A potboy could write better narrative.'

'Who are to have copies?'

'No one, if I could help it. But I suppose your mother will expect one?'

'And—Milvain?'

'I suppose so,' he replied, indifferently. 'But not unless he asks for it. Poor old Biffen, of course; though it'll make him despise me. Then one for ourselves. That leaves two—to light the fire with. We have been rather short of fire-paper since we couldn't afford our daily newspaper.'

'Will you let me give one to Mrs. Carter?'

'As you please.'

He took one set and added it to the row of his productions which stood on a topmost shelf. Amy laid her hand upon his shoulder, and contemplated the effect of this addition.

'The works of Edwin Reardon,' she said, with a smile.

'The work, at all events—rather a different thing, unfortunately. Amy, if only I were back at the time when I wrote "On Neutral Ground," and yet had you with me! How full my mind was in those days! Then I had only to look, and I *saw* something; now I strain my eyes, but

can make out nothing more than nebulous grotesques. I used to sit down knowing so well what I had to say ; now I strive to invent, and never come at anything. Suppose you pick up a needle with warm, supple fingers ; try to do it when your hand is stiff and numb with cold ; there's the difference between my manner of work in those days and what it is now.'

' But you are going to get back your health. You will write better than ever.'

' We shall see. Of course there was a great deal of miserable struggle even then, but I remember it as insignificant compared with the hours of contented work. I seldom did anything in the mornings except think and prepare ; towards evening I felt myself getting ready, and at last I sat down with the first lines buzzing in my head. And I used to read a great deal at the same time. Whilst I was writing " On Neutral Ground " I went solidly through the " Divina Commedia," a canto each day. Very often I wrote till after midnight, but occasionally I got my quantum finished much earlier, and then I used to treat myself to a ramble about the streets. I can recall exactly the places where some of my best ideas came to me. You remember the scene in Prendergast's lodg-

ings? That flashed on me late one night as I was turning out of Leicester Square into the slum that leads to Clare Market; ah, how well I remember! And I went home to my garret in a state of delightful fever, and scribbled notes furiously before going to bed.'

'Don't trouble; it'll all come back to you.'

'But in those days I hadn't to think of money. I could look forward and see provision for my needs. I never asked myself what I should get for the book; I assure you, that never came into my head—never. The work was done for its own sake. No hurry to finish it; if I felt that I wasn't up to the mark, I just waited till the better mood returned. "On Neutral Ground" took me seven months; now I have to write three volumes in nine weeks, with the lash stinging on my back if I miss a day.'

He brooded for a little.

'I suppose there must be some rich man somewhere who has read one or two of my books with a certain interest. If only I could encounter him and tell him plainly what a cursed state I am in, perhaps he would help me to some means of earning a couple of pounds a week. One has heard of such things.'

'In the old days.'

‘Yes. I doubt if it ever happens now. Coleridge wouldn’t so easily meet with his Gillman nowadays. Well, I am not a Coleridge, and I don’t ask to be lodged under any man’s roof; but if I could earn money enough to leave me good long evenings unspoilt by fear of the workhouse——’

Amy turned away, and presently went to look after her little boy.

A few days after this they had a visit from Milvain. He came about ten o’clock in the evening.

‘I’m not going to stay,’ he announced. ‘But where’s my copy of “Margaret Home.”? I am to have one, I suppose?’

‘I have no particular desire that you should read it,’ returned Reardon.

‘But I *have* read it, my dear fellow. Got it from the library on the day of publication; I had a suspicion that you wouldn’t send me a copy. But I must possess your *opera omnia*.’

‘Here it is. Hide it away somewhere.—You may as well sit down for a few minutes.’

‘I confess I should like to talk about the book, if you don’t mind. It isn’t so utterly and damnably bad as you make out, you know. The misfortune was that you had to make three

volumes of it. If I had leave to cut it down to one, it would do you credit. The motive is good enough.'

'Yes. Just good enough to show how badly it's managed.'

Milvain began to expatiate on that well-worn topic, the evils of the three-volume system.

'A triple-headed monster, sucking the blood of English novelists. One might design an allegorical cartoon for a comic literary paper. By-the-by, why doesn't such a thing exist?—a weekly paper treating of things and people literary in a facetious spirit. It would be caviare to the general, but might be supported, I should think. The editor would probably be assassinated, though.'

'For anyone in my position,' said Reardon, 'how is it possible to abandon the three volumes? It is a question of payment. An author of moderate repute may live on a yearly three-volume novel—I mean the man who is obliged to sell his book out and out, and who gets from one to two hundred pounds for it. But he would have to produce four one-volume novels to obtain the same income; and I doubt whether he could get so many published within the twelve months. And here comes in the benefit

of the libraries; from the commercial point of view the libraries are indispensable. Do you suppose the public would support the present number of novelists if each book had to be purchased? A sudden change to that system would throw three-fourths of the novelists out of work.'

'But there's no reason why the libraries shouldn't circulate novels in one volume.'

'Profits would be less, I suppose. People would take the minimum subscription.'

'Well, to go to the concrete, what about your own one-volume?'

'All but done.'

'And you'll offer it to Jedwood? Go and see him personally. He's a very decent fellow, I believe.'

Milvain stayed only half an hour. The days when he was wont to sit and talk at large through a whole evening were no more; partly because of his diminished leisure, but also for a less simple reason—the growth of something like estrangement between him and Reardon.

'You didn't mention your plans,' said Amy, when the visitor had been gone some time.

'No.'

Reardon was content with the negative, and his wife made no further remark.

The result of advertising the flat was that two or three persons called to make inspection. One of them, a man of military appearance, showed himself anxious to come to terms; he was willing to take the tenement from next quarter-day (June), but wished, if possible, to enter upon possession sooner than that.

‘Nothing could be better,’ said Amy in colloquy with her husband. ‘If he will pay for the extra time, we shall be only too glad.’

Reardon mused and looked gloomy. He could not bring himself to regard the experiment before him with hopefulness, and his heart sank at the thought of parting from Amy.

‘You are very anxious to get rid of me,’ he answered, trying to smile.

‘Yes, I am,’ she exclaimed; ‘but simply for your own good, as you know very well.’

‘Suppose I can’t sell this book?’

‘You will have a few pounds. Send your “Pliny” article to *The Wayside*. If you come to an end of all your money, mother shall lend you some.’

‘I am not very likely to do much work in *that* case.’

‘Oh, but you will sell the book. You’ll get twenty pounds for it, and that alone would keep

you for three months. Think—three months of the best part of the year at the seaside! Oh, you will do wonders!’

The furniture was to be housed at Mrs. Yule’s. Neither of them durst speak of selling it; that would have sounded too ominous. As for the locality of Reardon’s retreat, Amy herself had suggested Worthing, which she knew from a visit a few years ago; the advantages were its proximity to London, and the likelihood that very cheap lodgings could be found either in the town or near it. One room would suffice for the hapless author, and his expenses, beyond a trifling rent, would be confined to mere food. Oh yes, he might manage on considerably less than a pound a week.

Amy was in much better spirits than for a long time; she appeared to have convinced herself that there was no doubt of the issue of this perilous scheme; that her husband would write a notable book, receive a satisfactory price for it, and so re-establish their home. Yet her moods varied greatly. After all, there was delay in the letting of the flat, and this caused her annoyance. It was whilst the negotiations were still pending that she made her call upon Maud and Dora Milvain; Reardon did not know

of her intention to visit them until it had been carried out. She mentioned what she had done in almost a casual manner.

‘I had to get it over,’ she said, when Reardon exhibited surprise, ‘and I don’t think I made a very favourable impression.’

‘You told them, I suppose, what we are going to do?’

‘No; I didn’t say a word of it.’

‘But why not? It can’t be kept a secret. Milvain will have heard of it already, I should think, from your mother.’

‘From mother? But it’s the rarest thing for him to go there. Do you imagine he is a constant visitor? I thought it better to say nothing until the thing is actually done. Who knows what may happen?’

She was in a strange, nervous state, and Reardon regarded her uneasily. He talked very little in these days, and passed hours in dark reverie. His book was finished, and he awaited the publisher’s decision.

CHAPTER XVI

REJECTION

ONE of Reardon's minor worries at this time was the fear that by chance he might come upon a review of 'Margaret Home.' Since the publication of his first book he had avoided as far as possible all knowledge of what the critics had to say about him ; his nervous temperament could not bear the agitation of reading these remarks, which, however inept, define an author and his work to so many people incapable of judging for themselves. No man or woman could tell him anything in the way of praise or blame which he did not already know quite well ; commendation was pleasant, but it so often aimed amiss, and censure was for the most part so unintelligent. In the case of this latest novel he dreaded the sight of a review as he would have done a gash from a rusty knife. The judgments could not but be damnatory, and their expression in journalistic phrase would disturb his mind

with evil rancour. No one would have insight enough to appreciate the nature and cause of his book's demerits; every comment would be wide of the mark; sneer, ridicule, trite objection, would but madden him with a sense of injustice.

His position was illogical—one result of the moral weakness which was allied with his æsthetic sensibility. Putting aside the worthlessness of current reviewing, the critic of an isolated book has of course nothing to do with its author's state of mind and body any more than with the condition of his purse. Reardon would have granted this, but he could not command his emotions. He was in passionate revolt against the base necessities which compelled him to put forth work in no way representing his healthy powers, his artistic criterion. Not he had written this book, but his accursed poverty. To assail him as the author was, in his feeling, to be guilty of brutal insult. When by ill-hap a notice in one of the daily papers came under his eyes, it made his blood boil with a fierceness of hatred only possible to him in a profoundly morbid condition; he could not steady his hand for half an hour after. Yet this particular critic only said what was quite true—that the novel

contained not a single striking scene and not one living character; Reardon had expressed himself about it in almost identical terms. But he saw himself in the position of one sickly and all but destitute man against a relentless world, and every blow directed against him appeared dastardly. He could have cried 'Coward!' to the writer who wounded him.

The would-be sensational story which was now in Mr. Jedwood's hands had perhaps more merit than 'Margaret Home'; its brevity, and the fact that nothing more was aimed at than a concatenation of brisk events, made it not unreadable. But Reardon thought of it with humiliation. If it were published as his next work it would afford final proof to such sympathetic readers as he might still retain that he had hopelessly written himself out, and was now endeavouring to adapt himself to an inferior public. In spite of his dire necessities he now and then hoped that Jedwood might refuse the thing.

At moments he looked with sanguine eagerness to the three or four months he was about to spend in retirement, but such impulses were the mere outcome of his nervous disease. He had no faith in himself under present conditions;

the permanence of his sufferings would mean the sure destruction of powers he still possessed, though they were not at his command. Yet he believed that his mind was made up as to the advisability of trying this last resource ; he was impatient for the day of departure, and in the interval merely killed time as best he might. He could not read, and did not attempt to gather ideas for his next book ; the delusion that his mind was resting made an excuse to him for the barrenness of day after day. His 'Pliny' article had been despatched to *The Wayside*, and would possibly be accepted. But he did not trouble himself about this or other details ; it was as though his mind could do nothing more than grasp the bald fact of impending destitution ; with the steps towards that final stage he seemed to have little concern.

One evening he set forth to make a call upon Harold Biffen, whom he had not seen since the realist called to acknowledge the receipt of a copy of 'Margaret Home' left at his lodgings when he was out. Biffen resided in Clipstone Street, a thoroughfare discoverable in the dim district which lies between Portland Place and Tottenham Court Road. On knocking at the door of the lodging-house, Reardon learnt that

his friend was at home. He ascended to the third storey and tapped at a door which allowed rays of lamplight to issue from great gaps above and below. A sound of voices came from within, and on entering he perceived that Biffen was engaged with a pupil.

‘They didn’t tell me you had a visitor,’ he said. ‘I’ll call again later.’

‘No need to go away,’ replied Biffen, coming forward to shake hands. ‘Take a book for a few minutes. Mr. Baker won’t mind.’

It was a very small room, with a ceiling so low that the tall lodger could only just stand upright with safety ; perhaps three inches intervened between his head and the plaster, which was cracked, grimy, cobwebby. A small scrap of weedy carpet lay in front of the fireplace ; elsewhere the chinky boards were unconcealed. The furniture consisted of a round table, which kept such imperfect balance on its central support that the lamp entrusted to it looked in a dangerous position, of three small cane-bottomed chairs, a small wash-hand-stand with sundry rude appurtenances, and a chair-bedstead which the tenant opened at the hour of repose and spread with certain primitive trappings at present kept in a cupboard. There was no bookcase, but a

few hundred battered volumes were arranged some on the floor and some on a rough chest. The weather was too characteristic of an English spring to make an empty grate agreeable to the eye, but Biffen held it an axiom that fires were unseasonable after the first of May.

The individual referred to as Mr. Baker, who sat at the table in the attitude of a student, was a robust, hard-featured, black-haired young man of two-or three-and-twenty; judging from his weather-beaten cheeks and huge hands, as well as from the garb he wore, one would have presumed that study was not his normal occupation. There was something of the riverside about him; he might be a dockman, or even a bargeman. He looked intelligent, however, and bore himself with much modesty.

‘Now do endeavour to write in shorter sentences,’ said Biffen, who sat down by him and resumed the lesson, Reardon having taken up a volume. ‘This isn’t bad—it isn’t bad at all, I assure you; but you have put all you had to say into three appalling periods, whereas you ought to have made about a dozen.’

‘There it is, sir; there it is!’ exclaimed the man, smoothing his wiry hair. ‘I can’t break it up. The thoughts come in a lump, if I may say

so. To break it up—there's the art of compersition.'

Reardon could not refrain from a glance at the speaker, and Biffen, whose manner was very grave and kindly, turned to his friend with an explanation of the difficulties with which the student was struggling.

'Mr. Baker is preparing for the examination of the Outdoor Customs Department. One of the subjects is English composition, and really, you know, that isn't quite such a simple matter as some people think.'

Baker beamed upon the visitor with a homely, good-natured smile.

'I can make headway with the other things, sir,' he said, striking the table lightly with his clenched fist. 'There's handwriting, there's orthography, there's arithmetic ; I'm not afraid of one of 'em, as Mr. Biffen 'll tell you, sir. But when it comes to compersition, that brings out the sweat on my forehead, I do assure you.'

'You're not the only man in that case, Mr. Baker,' replied Reardon.

'It's thought a tough job in general, is it, sir?'

'It is indeed.'

'Two hundred marks for compersition,' con-

tinued the man. 'Now how many would they have given me for this bit of a try, Mr. Biffen?'

'Well, well; I can't exactly say. But you improve; you improve, decidedly. Peg away for another week or two.'

'Oh, don't fear me, sir! I'm not easily beaten when I've set my mind on a thing, and I'll break up the compersition yet, see if I don't!'

Again his fist descended upon the table in a way that reminded one of the steam-hammer cracking a nut.

The lesson proceeded for about ten minutes, Reardon, under pretence of reading, following it with as much amusement as anything could excite in him nowadays. At length Mr. Baker stood up, collected his papers and books, and seemed about to depart; but, after certain uneasy movements and glances, he said to Biffen in a subdued voice:

'Perhaps I might speak to you outside the door a minute, sir?'

He and the teacher went out, the door closed, and Reardon heard sounds of muffled conversation. In a minute or two a heavy footstep descended the stairs, and Biffen re-entered the room.

‘Now that’s a good, honest fellow,’ he said, in an amused tone. ‘It’s my pay-night, but he didn’t like to fork out money before you. A very unusual delicacy in a man of that standing. He pays me sixpence for an hour’s lesson ; that brings me two shillings a week. I sometimes feel a little ashamed to take his money, but then the fact is he’s a good deal better off than I am.’

‘Will he get a place in the Customs, do you think?’

‘Oh, I’ve no doubt of it. If it seemed unlikely, I should have told him so before this. To be sure, that’s a point I have often to consider, and once or twice my delicacy has asserted itself at the expense of my pocket. There was a poor consumptive lad came to me not long ago and wanted Latin lessons ; talked about going in for the London Matric., on his way to the pulpit. I couldn’t stand it. After a lesson or two I told him his cough was too bad, and he had no right to study until he got into better health ; that was better, I think, than saying plainly he had no chance on earth. But the food I bought with his money was choking me. Oh yes, Baker will make his way right enough. A good, modest fellow. You noticed how respectfully he spoke to me ? It doesn’t make any difference to

him that I live in a garret like this ; I'm a man of education, and he can separate this fact from my surroundings.'

'Biffen, why don't you get some decent position? Surely you might.'

'What position? No school would take me; I have neither credentials nor conventional clothing. For the same reason I couldn't get a private tutorship in a rich family. No, no; it's all right. I keep myself alive, and I get on with my work.—By-the-by, I've decided to write a book called "Mr. Bailey, Grocer."'

'What's the idea?'

'An objectionable word, that. Better say: "What's the reality?" Well, Mr. Bailey is a grocer in a little street by here. I have dealt with him for a long time, and as he's a talkative fellow I've come to know a good deal about him and his history. He's fond of talking about the struggle he had in his first year of business. He had no money of his own, but he married a woman who had saved forty-five pounds out of a cat's-meat business. You should see that woman! A big, coarse, squinting creature; at the time of the marriage she was a widow and forty-two years old. Now I'm going to tell the true story of Mr. Bailey's marriage and of his

progress as a grocer. It'll be a great book—a great book !'

He walked up and down the room, fervid with his conception.

'There'll be nothing bestial in it, you know. The decently ignoble—as I've so often said. The thing 'll take me a year at least. I shall do it slowly, lovingly. One volume, of course ; the length of the ordinary French novel. There's something fine in the title, don't you think? "Mr. Bailey, Grocer" !'

'I envy you, old fellow,' said Reardon, sighing. 'You have the right fire in you ; you have zeal and energy. Well, what do you think *I* have decided to do ?'

'I should like to hear.'

Reardon gave an account of his project. The other listened gravely, seated across a chair with his arms on the back.

'Your wife is in agreement with this ?'

'Oh yes.' He could not bring himself to say that Amy had suggested it. 'She has great hopes that the change will be just what I need.'

'I should say so too—if you were going to rest. But if you have to set to work at once it seems to me very doubtful.'

‘Never mind. For Heaven’s sake don’t discourage me! If this fails I think—upon my soul, I think I shall kill myself.’

‘Pooh!’ exclaimed Biffen, gently. ‘With a wife like yours?’

‘Just because of that.’

‘No, no; there’ll be some way out of it. By-the-by, I passed Mrs. Reardon this morning, but she didn’t see me. It was in Tottenham Court Road, and Milvain was with her. I felt myself too seedy in appearance to stop and speak.’

‘In Tottenham Court Road?’

That was not the detail of the story which chiefly held Reardon’s attention, yet he did not purposely make a misleading remark. His mind involuntarily played this trick.

‘I only saw them just as they were passing,’ pursued Biffen. ‘Oh, I knew I had something to tell you! Have you heard that Whelpdale is going to be married?’

Reardon shook his head in a preoccupied way.

‘I had a note from him this morning, telling me. He asked me to look him up to-night, and he’d let me know all about it. Let’s go together, shall we?’

‘I don’t feel much in the humour for Whelpdale. I’ll walk with you, and go on home.’

‘No, no; come and see him. It’ll do you good to talk a little.—But I must positively eat a mouthful before we go. I’m afraid you won’t care to join?’

He opened his cupboard, and brought out a loaf of bread and a saucer of dripping, with salt and pepper.

‘Better dripping this than I’ve had for a long time. I get it at Mr. Bailey’s—that isn’t his real name, of course. He assures me it comes from a large hotel where his wife’s sister is a kitchen-maid, and that it’s perfectly pure; they very often mix flour with it, you know, and perhaps more obnoxious things that an economical man doesn’t care to reflect upon. Now, with a little pepper and salt, this bread and dripping is as appetising food as I know. I often make a dinner of it.’

‘I have done the same myself before now. Do you ever buy pease-pudding?’

‘I should think so! I get magnificent pennyworths at a shop in Cleveland Street, of a very rich quality indeed. Excellent faggots they have there, too. I’ll give you a supper of them some night before you go.’

Biffen rose to enthusiasm in the contemplation of these dainties. He ate his bread and dripping with knife and fork ; this always made the fare seem more substantial.

‘Is it very cold out?’ he asked, rising from the table. ‘Need I put my overcoat on?’

This overcoat, purchased second-hand three years ago, hung on a door-nail. Comparative ease of circumstances had restored to the realist his ordinary indoor garment—a morning coat of the cloth called diagonal, rather large for him, but in better preservation than the other articles of his attire.

Reardon judging the overcoat necessary, his friend carefully brushed it and drew it on with a caution which probably had reference to starting seams. Then he put into the pocket his pipe, his pouch, his tobacco-stopper, and his matches, murmuring to himself a Greek iambic line which had come into his head *apropos* of nothing obvious.

‘Go out,’ he said, ‘and then I’ll extinguish the lamp. Mind the second step down, as usual.’

They issued into Clipstone Street, turned northward, crossed Euston Road, and came into Albany Street, where, in a house of decent

exterior, Mr. Whelpdale had his present abode. A girl who opened the door requested them to walk up to the topmost storey.

A cheery voice called to them from within the room at which they knocked. This lodging spoke more distinctly of civilisation than that inhabited by Biffen ; it contained the minimum supply of furniture needed to give it somewhat the appearance of a study, but the articles were in good condition. One end of the room was concealed by a chintz curtain ; scrutiny would have discovered behind the draping the essential equipments of a bedchamber.

Mr. Whelpdale sat by the fire, smoking a cigar. He was a plain-featured but graceful and refined-looking man of thirty, with wavy chestnut hair and a trimmed beard which became him well. At present he wore a dressing-gown and was without collar.

‘Welcome, gents both !’ he cried facetiously. ‘Ages since I saw you, Reardon. I’ve been reading your new book. Uncommonly good things in it here and there—uncommonly good.’

Whelpdale had the weakness of being unable to tell a disagreeable truth, and a tendency to flattery which had always made Reardon rather uncomfortable in his society. Though there

was no need whatever of his mentioning 'Margaret Home,' he preferred to frame smooth fictions rather than keep a silence which might be construed as unfavourable criticism.

'In the last volume,' he went on, 'I think there are one or two things as good as you ever did; I do indeed.'

Reardon made no acknowledgment of these remarks. They irritated him, for he knew their insincerity. Biffen, understanding his friend's silence, struck in on another subject.

'Who is this lady of whom you write to me?'

'Ah, quite a story! I'm going to be married, Reardon. A serious marriage. Light your pipes, and I'll tell you all about it. Startled you, I suppose, Biffen? Unlikely news, eh? Some people would call it a rash step, I dare say. We shall just take another room in this house, that's all. I think I can count upon an income of a couple of guineas a week, and I have plans without end that are pretty sure to bring in coin.'

Reardon did not care to smoke, but Biffen lit his pipe and waited with grave interest for the romantic narrative. Whenever he heard of a poor man's persuading a woman to share his

poverty he was eager of details; perchance he himself might yet have that heavenly good fortune.

‘Well,’ began Whelpdale, crossing his legs and watching a wreath he had just puffed from the cigar, ‘you know all about my literary advisership. The business goes on reasonably well. I’m going to extend it in ways I’ll explain to you presently. About six weeks ago I received a letter from a lady who referred to my advertisements, and said she had the manuscript of a novel which she would like to offer for my opinion. Two publishers had refused it, but one with complimentary phrases, and she hoped it mightn’t be impossible to put the thing into acceptable shape. Of course I wrote optimistically, and the manuscript was sent to me. Well, it wasn’t actually bad—by Jove! you should have seen some of the things I have been asked to recommend to publishers! It wasn’t hopelessly bad by any means, and I gave serious thought to it. After exchange of several letters I asked the authoress to come and see me, that we might save postage-stamps and talk things over. She hadn’t given me her address: I had to direct to a stationer’s in Bayswater. She agreed to come, and did come. I had formed a

sort of idea, but of course I was quite wrong. Imagine my excitement when there came in a very beautiful girl, a tremendously interesting girl, about one-and-twenty—just the kind of girl that most strongly appeals to me ; dark, pale, rather consumptive-looking, slender—no, there's no describing her ; there really isn't ! You must wait till you see her.'

'I hope the consumption was only a figure of speech,' remarked Biffen in his grave way.

'Oh, there's nothing serious the matter, I think. A slight cough, poor girl——'

'The deuce !' interjected Reardon.

'Oh, nothing, nothing ! It'll be all right. Well, now, of course we talked over the story—in good earnest, you know. Little by little I induced her to speak of herself—this, after she'd come two or three times—and she told me lamentable things. She was absolutely alone in London, and hadn't had sufficient food for weeks ; had sold all she could of her clothing ; and so on. Her home was in Birmingham ; she had been driven away by the brutality of a step-mother ; a friend lent her a few pounds, and she came to London with an unfinished novel. Well, you know, this kind of thing would be enough to make me soft-hearted to any girl, let

alone one who, to begin with, was absolutely my ideal. When she began to express a fear that I was giving too much time to her, that she wouldn't be able to pay my fees, and so on, I could restrain myself no longer. On the spot I asked her to marry me. I didn't practise any deception, mind. I told her I was a poor devil who had failed as a realistic novelist and was earning bread in haphazard ways; and I explained frankly that I thought we might carry on various kinds of business together: she might go on with her novel-writing, and—so on. But she was frightened; I had been too abrupt. That's a fault of mine, you know; but I was so confoundedly afraid of losing her. And I told her as much, plainly.'

Biffen smiled.

'This would be exciting,' he said, 'if we didn't know the end of the story.'

'Yes. Pity I didn't keep it a secret. Well, she wouldn't say yes, but I could see that she didn't absolutely say no. "In any case," I said, "you'll let me see you often? Fees be hanged! I'll work day and night for you. I'll do my utmost to get your novel accepted." And I implored her to let me lend her a little money. It was very difficult to persuade her, but at last

she accepted a few shillings. I could see in her face that she was hungry. Just imagine! A beautiful girl absolutely hungry; it drove me frantic! But that was a great point gained. After that we saw each other almost every day, and at last—she consented! Did indeed! I can hardly believe it yet. We shall be married in a fortnight's time.'

'I congratulate you,' said Reardon.

'So do I,' sighed Biffen.

'The day before yesterday she went to Birmingham to see her father and tell him all about the affair. I agreed with her it was as well; the old fellow isn't badly off, and he may forgive her for running away, though he's under his wife's thumb, it appears. I had a note yesterday. She had gone to a friend's house for the first day. I hoped to have heard again this morning—must to-morrow, in any case. I live, as you may imagine, in wild excitement. Of course, if the old man stumps up a wedding-present, all the better. But I don't care; we'll make a living somehow. What do you think I'm writing just now? An author's Guide. You know the kind of thing; they sell splendidly. Of course I shall make it a good advertisement of my business. Then I have a splendid idea.

I'm going to advertise: "Novel-writing taught in ten lessons!" What do you think of that? No swindle; not a bit of it. I am quite capable of giving the ordinary man or woman ten very useful lessons. I've been working out the scheme; it would amuse you vastly, Reardon. The first lesson deals with the question of subjects, local colour—that kind of thing. I gravely advise people, if they possibly can, to write of the wealthy middle class; that's the popular subject, you know. Lords and ladies are all very well, but the real thing to take is a story about people who have no titles, but live in good Philistine style. I urge study of horsey matters especially; that's very important. You must be well up, too, in military grades, know about Sandhurst, and so on. Boating is an important topic. You see? Oh, I shall make a great thing of this. I shall teach my wife carefully, and then let her advertise lessons to girls; they'll prefer coming to a woman, you know.'

Biffen leant back and laughed noisily.

'How much shall you charge for the course?' asked Reardon.

'That'll depend. I shan't refuse a guinea or two; but some people may be made to pay five, perhaps.'

Someone knocked at the door, and a voice said :

‘ A letter for you, Mr. Whelpdale.’

He started up, and came back into the room with face illuminated.

‘ Yes, it’s from Birmingham ; posted this morning. Look what an exquisite hand she writes !’

He tore open the envelope. In delicacy Reardon and Biffen averted their eyes. There was silence for a minute, then a strange ejaculation from Whelpdale caused his friends to look up at him. He had gone pale, and was frowning at the sheets of paper which trembled in his hand.

‘ No bad news, I hope ?’ Biffen ventured to say.

Whelpdale let himself sink into a chair.

‘ Now if this isn’t too bad !’ he exclaimed in a thick voice. ‘ If this isn’t monstrously unkind ! I never heard anything so gross as this—never !’

The two waited, trying not to smile.

‘ She writes—that she has met an old lover—in Birmingham—that it was with him she had quarrelled—not with her father at all—that she ran away to annoy him and frighten him—that

she has made it up again, and they're going to be married !'

He let the sheet fall, and looked so utterly woebegone that his friends at once exerted themselves to offer such consolation as the case admitted of. Reardon thought better of Whelpdale for this emotion ; he had not believed him capable of it.

'It isn't a case of vulgar cheating!' cried the forsaken one presently. 'Don't go away thinking that. She writes in real distress and penitence—she does indeed. Oh, the devil! Why did I let her go to Birmingham? A fortnight more, and I should have had her safe. But it's just like my luck. Do you know that this is the third time I've been engaged to be married?—no, by Jove, the fourth! And every time the girl has got out of it at the last moment. What an unlucky beast I am! A girl who was positively my ideal! I haven't even a photograph of her to show you; but you'd be astonished at her face. Why, in the devil's name, did I let her go to Birmingham?'

The visitors had risen. They felt uncomfortable, for it seemed as if Whelpdale might find vent for his distress in tears.

‘We had better leave you,’ suggested Biffen.
‘It’s very hard—it is indeed.’

‘Look here! Read the letter for yourselves!
Do!’

They declined, and begged him not to insist.

‘But I want you to see what kind of girl she is. It isn’t a case of farcical deceiving—not a bit of it! She implores me to forgive her, and blames herself no end. Just my luck! The third—no, the fourth time, by Jove! Never was such an unlucky fellow with women. It’s because I’m so damnably poor; that’s it, of course!’

Reardon and his companion succeeded at length in getting away, though not till they had heard the virtues and beauty of the vanished girl described again and again in much detail. Both were in a state of depression as they left the house.

‘What think you of this story?’ asked Biffen.
‘Is this possible in a woman of any merit?’

‘Anything is possible in a woman,’ Reardon replied, harshly.

They walked in silence as far as Portland Road Station. There, with an assurance that he would come to a garret-supper before leaving

London, Reardon parted from his friend and turned westward.

As soon as he had entered, Amy's voice called to him.

‘Here's a letter from Jedwood, Edwin!’

He stepped into the study.

‘It came just after you went out, and it has been all I could do to resist the temptation to open it.’

‘Why shouldn't you have opened it?’ said her husband, carelessly.

He tried to do so himself, but his shaking hand thwarted him at first. Succeeding at length, he found a letter in the publisher's own writing, and the first word that caught his attention was ‘regret.’ With an angry effort to command himself he ran through the communication, then held it out to Amy.

She read, and her countenance fell. Mr. Jedwood regretted that the story offered to him did not seem likely to please that particular public to whom his series of one-volume novels made appeal. He hoped it would be understood that, in declining, he by no means expressed an adverse judgment on the story itself, &c.

‘It doesn't surprise me,’ said Reardon. ‘I believe he is quite right. The thing is too

empty to please the better kind of readers, yet not vulgar enough to please the worse.'

'But you'll try someone else?'

'I don't think it's much use.'

They sat opposite each other, and kept silence. Jedwood's letter slipped from Amy's lap to the ground.

'So,' said Reardon, presently, 'I don't see how our plan is to be carried out.'

'Oh, it *must* be!'

'But how?'

'You'll get seven or eight pounds from *The Wayside*. And—hadn't we better sell the furniture, instead of——'

His look checked her.

'It seems to me, Amy, that your one desire is to get away from me, on whatever terms.'

'Don't begin that over again!' she exclaimed, fretfully. 'If you don't believe what I say——'

They were both in a state of intolerable nervous tension. Their voices quivered, and their eyes had an unnatural brightness.

'If we sell the furniture,' pursued Reardon, 'that means you'll never come back to me. You wish to save yourself and the child from the hard life that seems to be before us.'

'Yes, I do; but not by deserting you. I

want you to go and work for us all, so that we may live more happily before long. Oh, how wretched this is !’

She burst into hysterical weeping. But Reardon, instead of attempting to soothe her, went into the next room, where he sat for a long time in the dark. When he returned Amy was calm again; her face expressed a cold misery.

‘Where did you go this morning?’ he asked, as if wishing to talk of common things.

‘I told you. I went to buy those things for Willie.’

‘Oh yes.’

There was a silence.

‘Biffen passed you in Tottenham Court Road,’ he added.

‘I didn’t see him.’

‘No; he said you didn’t.’

‘Perhaps,’ said Amy, ‘it was just when I was speaking to Mr. Milvain.’

‘You met Milvain?’

‘Yes.’

‘Why didn’t you tell me?’

‘I’m sure I don’t know. I can’t mention every trifle that happens.’

‘No, of course not.’

Amy closed her eyes, as if in weariness, and for a minute or two Reardon observed her countenance.

‘So you think we had better sell the furniture?’

‘I shall say nothing more about it. You must do as seems best to you, Edwin.’

‘Are you going to see your mother to-morrow?’

‘Yes. I thought you would like to come too.’

‘No ; there’s no good in my going.’

He again rose, and that night they talked no more of their difficulties, though on the morrow (Sunday) it would be necessary to decide their course in every detail.

CHAPTER XVII

THE PARTING

AMY did not go to church. Before her marriage she had done so as a mere matter of course, accompanying her mother, but Reardon's attitude with regard to the popular religion speedily became her own; she let the subject lapse from her mind, and cared neither to defend nor to attack where dogma was concerned. She had no sympathies with mysticism; her nature was strongly practical, with something of zeal for intellectual attainment superadded.

This Sunday morning she was very busy with domestic minutiae. Reardon noticed what looked like preparations for packing, and being as little disposed for conversation as his wife, he went out and walked for a couple of hours in the Hampstead region. Dinner over, Amy at once made ready for her journey to Westbourne Park.

'Then you won't come?' she said to her husband.

‘No. I shall see your mother before I go away, but I don’t care to till you have settled everything.’

It was half a year since he had met Mrs. Yule. She never came to their dwelling, and Reardon could not bring himself to visit her.

‘You had very much rather we didn’t sell the furniture?’ Amy asked.

‘Ask your mother’s opinion. That shall decide.’

‘There’ll be the expense of moving it, you know. Unless money comes from *The Wayside*, you’ll only have two or three pounds left.’

Reardon made no reply. He was overcome by the bitterness of shame.

‘I shall say, then,’ pursued Amy, who spoke with averted face, ‘that I am to go there for good on Tuesday? I mean, of course, for the summer months.’

‘I suppose so.’

Then he turned suddenly upon her.

‘Do you really imagine that at the end of the summer I shall be a rich man? What do you mean by talking in this way? If the furniture is sold to supply me with a few pounds for the present, what prospect is there that I shall be able to buy new?’

‘How can we look forward at all?’ replied Amy. ‘It has come to the question of how we are to subsist. I thought you would rather get money in this way than borrow of mother—when she has the expense of keeping me and Willie.’

‘You are right,’ muttered Reardon. ‘Do as you think best.’

Amy was in her most practical mood, and would not linger for purposeless talk. A few minutes, and Reardon was left alone.

He stood before his bookshelves and began to pick out the volumes which he would take away with him. Just a few, the indispensable companions of a bookish man who still clings to life—his Homer, his Shakespeare——

The rest must be sold. He would get rid of them to-morrow morning. All together they might bring him a couple of sovereigns.

Then his clothing. Amy had fulfilled all the domestic duties of a wife; his wardrobe was in as good a state as circumstances allowed. But there was no object in burdening himself with winter garments, for, if he lived through the summer at all, he would be able to repurchase such few poor things as were needful; at present he could only think of how to get

together a few coins. So he made a heap of such things as might be sold.

The furniture? If it must go, the price could scarcely be more than ten or twelve pounds; well, perhaps fifteen. To be sure, in this way his summer's living would be abundantly provided for.

He thought of Biffen enviously. Biffen, if need be, could support life on three or four shillings a week, happy in the thought that no mortal had a claim upon him. If he starved to death—well, many another lonely man has come to that end. If he preferred to kill himself, who would be distressed? Spoilt child of fortune!

The bells of St. Marylebone began to clang for afternoon service. In the idleness of dull pain his thoughts followed their summons, and he marvelled that there were people who could imagine it a duty or find it a solace to go and sit in that twilight church and listen to the droning of prayers. He thought of the wretched millions of mankind to whom life is so barren that they must needs believe in a recompense beyond the grave. For that he neither looked nor longed. The bitterness of his lot was that this world might be a sufficing paradise to him

if only he could clutch a poor little share of current coin. He had won the world's greatest prize—a woman's love—but could not retain it because his pockets were empty.

That he should fail to make a great name, this was grievous disappointment to Amy, but this alone would not have estranged her. It was the dread and shame of penury that made her heart cold to him. And he could not in his conscience scorn her for being thus affected by the vulgar circumstances of life; only a few supreme natures stand unshaken under such a trial, and though his love of Amy was still passionate, he knew that her place was among a certain class of women, and not on the isolated pinnacle where he had at first visioned her. It was entirely natural that she shrank at the test of squalid suffering. A little money, and he could have rested secure in her love, for then he would have been able to keep ever before her the best qualities of his heart and brain. Upon him, too, penury had its debasing effect; as he now presented himself he was not a man to be admired or loved. It was all simple and intelligible enough—a situation that would be misread only by shallow idealism.

Worst of all, she was attracted by Jasper

Milvain's energy and promise of success. He had no ignoble suspicions of Amy, but it was impossible for him not to see that she habitually contrasted the young journalist, who laughingly made his way among men, with her grave, dispirited husband, who was not even capable of holding such position as he had gained. She enjoyed Milvain's conversation, it put her into a good humour ; she liked him personally, and there could be no doubt that she had observed a jealous tendency in Reardon's attitude to his former friend—always a harmful suggestion to a woman. Formerly she had appreciated her husband's superiority ; she had smiled at Milvain's commoner stamp of mind and character. But tedious repetition of failure had outwearied her, and now she saw Milvain in the sunshine of progress, dwelt upon the worldly advantages of gifts and a temperament such as his. Again, simple and intelligible enough.

Living apart from her husband, she could not be expected to forswear society, and doubtless she would see Milvain pretty often. He called occasionally at Mrs. Yule's, and would not do so less often when he knew that Amy was to be met there. There would be chance encounters

like that of yesterday, of which she had chosen to keep silence.

A dark fear began to shadow him. In yielding thus passively to stress of circumstances, was he not exposing his wife to a danger which outweighed all the ills of poverty? As one to whom she was inestimably dear, was he right in allowing her to leave him, if only for a few months? He knew very well that a man of strong character would never have entertained this project. He had got into the way of thinking of himself as too weak to struggle against the obstacles on which Amy insisted, and of looking for safety in retreat; but what was to be the end of this weakness if the summer did not at all advance him? He knew better than Amy could how unlikely it was that he should recover the energies of his mind in so short a time and under such circumstances; only the feeble man's temptation to postpone effort had made him consent to this step, and now that he was all but beyond turning back, the perils of which he had thought too little forced themselves upon his mind.

He rose in anguish, and stood looking about him as if aid might somewhere be visible.

Presently there was a knock at the front

door, and on opening he beheld the vivacious Mr. Carter. This gentleman had only made two or three calls here since Reardon's marriage ; his appearance was a surprise.

‘I hear you are leaving town for a time,’ he exclaimed. ‘Edith told me yesterday, so I thought I'd look you up.’

He was in spring costume, and exhaled fresh odours. The contrast between his prosperous animation and Reardon's broken-spirited quietness could not have been more striking.

‘Going away for your health, they tell me. You've been working too hard, you know. You mustn't overdo it. And where do you think of going to?’

‘It isn't at all certain that I shall go,’ Reardon replied. ‘I thought of a few weeks—somewhere at the seaside.’

‘I advise you to go north,’ went on Carter cheerily. ‘You want a tonic, you know. Get up into Scotland and do some boating and fishing—that kind of thing. You'd come back a new man. Edith and I had a turn up there last year, you know ; it did me heaps of good.’

‘Oh, I don't think I should go so far as that.’

‘But that's just what you want—a regular

change, something bracing. You don't look at all well, that's the fact. A winter in London tries any man—it does me, I know. I've been seedy myself these last few weeks. Edith wants me to take her over to Paris at the end of this month, and I think it isn't a bad idea; but I'm so confoundedly busy. In the autumn we shall go to Norway, I think; it seems to be the right thing to do nowadays. Why shouldn't you have a run over to Norway? They say it can be done very cheaply; the steamers take you for next to nothing.'

He talked on with the joyous satisfaction of a man whose income is assured, and whose future teems with a succession of lively holidays. Reardon could make no answer to such suggestions; he sat with a fixed smile on his face.

'Have you heard,' said Carter, presently, 'that we're opening a branch of the hospital in the City Road?'

'No; I hadn't heard of it.'

'It'll only be for out-patients. Open three mornings and three evenings alternately.'

'Who'll represent you there?'

'I shall look in now and then, of course; there'll be a clerk, like at the old place.'

He talked of the matter in detail—of the

doctors who would attend, and of certain new arrangements to be tried.

‘Have you engaged the clerk?’ Reardon asked.

‘Not yet. I think I know a man who’ll suit me, though.’

‘You wouldn’t be disposed to give me the chance?’

Reardon spoke huskily, and ended with a broken laugh.

‘You’re rather above my figure nowadays, old man!’ exclaimed Carter, joining in what he considered the jest.

‘Shall you pay a pound a week?’

‘Twenty-five shillings. It’ll have to be a man who can be trusted to take money from the paying patients.’

‘Well, I am serious. Will you give me the place?’

Carter gazed at him, and checked another laugh.

‘What the deuce do you mean?’

‘The fact is,’ Reardon replied, ‘I want variety of occupation. I can’t stick at writing for more than a month or two at a time. It’s because I have tried to do so that—well, practically, I have broken down. If you will give

me this clerkship, it will relieve me from the necessity of perpetually writing novels; I shall be better for it in every way. You know that I'm equal to the job; you can trust me; and I dare say I shall be more useful than most clerks you could get.'

It was done, most happily done, on the first impulse. A minute more of pause, and he could not have faced the humiliation. His face burned, his tongue was parched.

'I'm floored!' cried Carter. 'I shouldn't have thought—but of course, if you really want it. I can hardly believe yet that you're serious, Reardon.'

'Why not? Will you promise me the work?'

'Well, yes.'

'When shall I have to begin?'

'The place 'll be opened to-morrow week. But how about your holiday?'

'Oh, let that stand over. It'll be holiday enough to occupy myself in a new way. An old way, too; I shall enjoy it.'

He laughed merrily, relieved beyond measure at having come to what seemed an end of his difficulties. For half an hour they continued to talk over the affair.

‘Weil, it’s a comical idea,’ said Carter, as he took his leave, ‘but you know your own business best.’

When Amy returned, Reardon allowed her to put the child to bed before he sought any conversation. She came at length and sat down in the study.

‘Mother advises us not to sell the furniture,’ were her first words.

‘I’m glad of that, as I had quite made up my mind not to.’

There was a change in his way of speaking which she at once noticed:

‘Have you thought of something?’

‘Yes. Carter has been here, and he happened to mention that they’re opening an outpatient department of the hospital, in the City Road. He’ll want someone to help him there. I asked for the post, and he promised it me.’

The last words were hurried, though he had resolved to speak with deliberation. No more feebleness; he had taken a decision, and would act upon it as became a responsible man.

‘The post?’ said Amy. ‘What post?’

‘In plain English, the clerkship. It’ll be the same work as I used to have—registering patients, receiving their “letters,” and so on.

The pay is to be five-and-twenty shillings a week.'

Amy sat upright and looked steadily at him.

'Is this a joke?'

'Far from it, dear. It's a blessed deliverance.'

'You have asked Mr. Carter to take you back as a clerk?'

'I have.'

'And you propose that we shall live on twenty-five shillings a week?'

'Oh no! I shall be engaged only three mornings in the week and three evenings. In my free time I shall do literary work, and no doubt I can earn fifty pounds a year by it—if I have your sympathy to help me. To-morrow I shall go and look for rooms some distance from here; in Islington, I think. We have been living far beyond our means; that must come to an end. We'll have no more keeping up of sham appearances. If I can make my way in literature, well and good; in that case our position and prospects will of course change. But for the present we are poor people, and must live in a poor way. If our friends like to come and see us, they must put aside all snobbishness, and take

us as we are. If they prefer not to come, there'll be an excuse in our remoteness.'

Amy was stroking the back of her hand. After a long silence, she said in a very quiet, but very resolute tone:

.. 'I shall not consent to this.'

'In that case, Amy, I must do without your consent. The rooms will be taken, and our furniture transferred to them.'

'To me that will make no difference,' returned his wife, in the same voice as before. 'I have decided—as you told me to—to go with Willie to mother's next Tuesday. You, of course, must do as you please. I should have thought a summer at the seaside would have been more helpful to you; but if you prefer to live in Islington——'

Reardon approached her, and laid a hand on her shoulder.

'Amy, are you my wife, or not?'

.. 'I am certainly not the wife of a clerk who is paid so much a week.'

He had foreseen a struggle, but without certainty of the form Amy's opposition would take. For himself, he meant to be gently resolute, calmly regardless of protest. But in a man to whom such self-assertion is a matter of conscious

effort, tremor of the nerves will always interfere with the line of conduct he has conceived in advance. Already Reardon had spoken with far more bluntness than he proposed ; involuntarily, his voice slipped from earnest determination to the note of absolutism, and, as is wont to be the case, the sound of these strange tones instigated him to further utterances of the same kind. He lost control of himself ; Amy's last reply went through him like an electric shock, and for the moment he was a mere husband defied by his wife, the male stung to exertion of his brute force against the physically weaker sex.

‘However you regard me, you will do what I think fit. I shall not argue with you. If I choose to take lodgings in Whitechapel, there you will come and live.’

He met Amy's full look, and was conscious of that in it which corresponded to his own brutality. She had become suddenly a much older woman ; her cheeks were tight drawn into thinness, her lips were bloodlessly hard, there was an unknown furrow along her forehead, and she glared like the animal that defends itself with tooth and claw.

‘Do as *you* think fit ? Indeed !’

Could Amy's voice sound like that ? Great

Heaven! With just such accent he had heard a wrangling woman retort upon her husband at the street corner. Is there then no essential difference between a woman of this world and one of that? Does the same nature lie beneath such unlike surfaces?

He had but to do one thing: to seize her by the arm, drag her up from the chair, dash her back again with all his force—there, the transformation would be complete, they would stand towards each other on the natural footing. With an added curse perhaps——

Instead of that, he choked, struggled for breath, and shed tears.

Amy turned scornfully away from him. Blows and a curse would have overawed her, at all events for the moment; she would have felt: ‘Yes, he is a man, and I have put my destiny into his hands.’ His tears moved her to a feeling cruelly exultant; they were the sign of her superiority. It was she who should have wept, and never in her life had she been further from such display of weakness.

This could not be the end, however, and she had no wish to terminate the scene. They stood for a minute without regarding each other, then Reardon faced to her.

‘ You refuse to live with me, then ? ’

‘ Yes, if this is the kind of life you offer me. ’

‘ You would be more ashamed to share your husband’s misfortunes than to declare to everyone that you had deserted him ? ’

‘ I shall “ declare to everyone ” the simple truth. You have the opportunity of making one more effort to save us from degradation. You refuse to take the trouble ; you prefer to drag me down into a lower rank of life. I can’t and won’t consent to that. The disgrace is yours ; it’s fortunate for me that I have a decent home to go to. ’

‘ Fortunate for you !—you make yourself unutterably contemptible. I have done nothing that justifies you in leaving me. It is for me to judge what I can do and what I can’t. A good woman would see no degradation in what I ask of you. But to run away from me just because I am poorer than you ever thought I should be——’

He was incoherent. A thousand passionate things that he wished to say clashed together in his mind and confused his speech. Defeated in the attempt to act like a strong man, he could not yet recover standing-ground, knew not how to tone his utterances.

‘Yes, of course, that’s how you will put it,’ said Amy. ‘That’s how you will represent me to your friends. *My* friends will see it in a different light.’

‘They will regard you as a martyr?’

‘No one shall make a martyr of me, you may be sure. I was unfortunate enough to marry a man who had no delicacy, no regard for my feelings.—I am not the first woman who has made a mistake of this kind.’

‘No delicacy? No regard for your feelings?—Have I always utterly misunderstood you? Or has poverty changed you to a woman I can’t recognise?’

He came nearer, and gazed desperately into her face. Not a muscle of it showed susceptibility to the old influences.

‘Do you know, Amy,’ he added in a lower voice, ‘that if we part now, we part for ever?’

‘I’m afraid that is only too likely.’

She moved aside.

‘You mean that you wish it. You are weary of me, and care for nothing but how to make yourself free.’

‘I shall argue no more. I am tired to death of it.’

‘Then say nothing, but listen for the last

time to my view of the position we have come to. When I consented to leave you for a time, to go away and try to work in solitude, I was foolish and even insincere, both to you and to myself. I knew that I was undertaking the impossible. It was just putting off the evil day, that was all—putting off the time when I should have to say plainly: “I can’t live by literature, so I must look out for some other employment.” I shouldn’t have been so weak but that I knew how *you* would regard such a decision as that. I was afraid to tell the truth—afraid. Now, when Carter of a sudden put this opportunity before me, I saw all the absurdity of the arrangements we had made. It didn’t take me a moment to make up my mind. Anything was to be chosen rather than a parting from you on false pretences, a ridiculous affectation of hope where there was no hope.’

He paused, and saw that his words had no effect upon her.

‘And a grievous share of the fault lies with you, Amy. You remember very well when I first saw how dark the future was. I was driven even to say that we ought to change our mode of living; I asked you if you would be willing to leave this place and go into cheaper rooms.

And you know what your answer was. Not a sign in you that you would stand by me if the worst came. I knew then what I had to look forward to, but I durst not believe it. I kept saying to myself: She loves me, and as soon as she really understands—— That was all self-deception. If I had been a wise man, I should have spoken to you in a way you couldn't mistake. I should have told you that we were living recklessly, and that I had determined to alter it. I have no delicacy? No regard for your feelings? Oh, if I had had less! I doubt whether you can even understand some of the considerations that weighed with me, and made me cowardly—though I once thought there was no refinement of sensibility that you couldn't enter into. Yes, I was absurd enough to say to myself: It will look as if I had consciously deceived her; she may suffer from the thought that I won her at all hazards, knowing that I should soon expose her to poverty and all sorts of humiliation. Impossible to speak of that again; I had to struggle desperately on, trying to hope. Oh! if you knew——'

His voice gave way for an instant.

'I don't understand how you could be so thoughtless and heartless. You knew that I

was almost mad with anxiety at times. Surely, any woman must have had the impulse to give what help was in her power. How could you hesitate? Had you no suspicion of what a relief and encouragement it would be to me, if you said: Yes, we must go and live in a simpler way? If only as a proof that you loved me, how I should have welcomed that! You helped me in nothing. You threw all the responsibility upon me—always bearing in mind, I suppose, that there was a refuge for you. Even now, I despise myself for saying such things of you, though I know so bitterly that they are true. It takes a long time to see *you* as such a different woman from the one I worshipped. In passion, I can fling out violent words, but they don't yet answer to my actual feeling. It will be long enough yet before I *think* contemptuously of you. You know that when a light is suddenly extinguished, the image of it still shows before your eyes. But at last comes the darkness.'

Amy turned towards him once more.

'Instead of saying all this, you might be proving that I am wrong. Do so, and I will gladly confess it.'

'That you are wrong? I don't see your meaning.'

‘You might prove that you are willing to do your utmost to save me from humiliation.’

‘Amy, I *have* done my utmost. I have done more than you can imagine.’

‘No. You have toiled on in illness and anxiety—I know that. But a chance is offered you now of working in a better way. Till that is tried, you have no right to give all up and try to drag me down with you.’

‘I don’t know how to answer. I have told you so often——You *can’t* understand me!’

‘I can! I can!’ Her voice trembled for the first time. ‘I know that you are so ready to give in to difficulties. Listen to me, and do as I bid you.’ She spoke in the strangest tone of command. It was command, not exhortation, but there was no harshness in her voice. ‘Go at once to Mr. Carter. Tell him you have made a ludicrous mistake—in a fit of low spirits; anything you like to say. Tell him you of course couldn’t dream of becoming his clerk. To-night; at once! You understand me, Edwin? Go now, this moment.’

‘Have you determined to see *how* weak I am? Do you wish to be able to despise me more completely still?’

‘I am determined to be your friend, and to save you from yourself. Go at once! Leave all the rest to me. If I have let things take their course till now, it shan’t be so in future. The responsibility shall be with *me*. Only do as I tell you.’

‘You know it’s impossible——’

‘It is *not*! I will find money. No one shall be allowed to say that we are parting; no one has any such idea yet. You are going away for your health, just three summer months. I have been far more careful of appearances than you imagine, but you give me credit for so little. I will find the money you need, until you have written another book. I promise; I undertake it. Then I will find another home for us, of the proper kind. You shall have no trouble. You shall give yourself entirely to intellectual things. But Mr. Carter must be told at once, before he can spread a report. If he has spoken, he must contradict what he has said.’

‘But you amaze me, Amy. Do you mean to say that you look upon it as a veritable disgrace, my taking this clerkship?’

‘I do. I can’t help my nature. I am ashamed through and through that you should sink to this.’

‘But everyone knows that I was a clerk once!’

‘Very few people know it. And then that isn’t the same thing. It doesn’t matter what one has been in the past. Especially a literary man; everyone expects to hear that he was once poor. But to fall from the position you now have, and to take weekly wages—you surely can’t know how people of my world regard that.’

‘Of your world? I had thought your world was the same as mine, and knew nothing whatever of these imbecilities.’

‘It is getting late. Go and see Mr. Carter, and afterwards I will talk as much as you like.’

He might perhaps have yielded, but the unemphasised contempt in that last sentence was more than he could bear. It demonstrated to him more completely than set terms could have done what a paltry weakling he would appear in Amy’s eyes if he took his hat down from the peg and set out to obey her orders.

‘You are asking too much,’ he said, with unexpected coldness. ‘If my opinions are so valueless to you that you dismiss them like those of a troublesome child, I wonder you think it worth while to try and keep up appearances about me. It is very simple: make known to

everyone that you are in no way connected with the disgrace I have brought upon myself. Put an advertisement in the newspapers to that effect, if you like—as men do about their wives' debts. I have chosen my part. I can't stultify myself to please you.'

She knew that this was final. His voice had the true ring of shame in revolt.

'Then go your way, and I will go mine!'

Amy left the room.

When Reardon went into the bedchamber an hour later, he unfolded a chair bedstead that stood there, threw some rugs upon it, and so lay down to pass the night. He did not close his eyes. Amy slept for an hour or two before dawn, and on waking she started up and looked anxiously about the room. But neither spoke.

There was a pretence of ordinary breakfast; the little servant necessitated that. When she saw her husband preparing to go out, Amy asked him to come into the study.

'How long shall you be away?' she asked, curtly.

'It is doubtful. I am going to look for rooms.'

'Then no doubt I shall be gone when you

come back. There's no object, now, in my staying here till to-morrow.'

'As you please.'

'Do you wish Lizzie still to come?'

'No. Please to pay her wages and dismiss her. Here is some money.'

'I think you had better let me see to that.'

He flung the coin on to the table and opened the door. Amy stepped quickly forward, and closed it again.

'This is our good-bye, is it?' she asked, her eyes on the ground.

'As you wish it—yes.'

'You will remember that I have *not* wished it.'

'In that case, you have only to go with me to the new home.'

'I can't.'

'Then you have made your choice.'

She did not prevent his opening the door this time, and he passed out without looking at her.

His return was at three in the afternoon. Amy and the child were gone; the servant was gone. The table in the dining-room was spread as if for one person's meal.

He went into the bedroom. Amy's trunks

had disappeared. The child's cot was covered over. In the study, he saw that the sovereign he had thrown on to the table still lay in the same place.

As it was a very cold day he lit a fire. Whilst it burnt up he sat reading a torn portion of a newspaper, and became quite interested in the report of a commercial meeting in the City, a thing he would never have glanced at under ordinary circumstances. The fragment fell at length from his hands; his head drooped; he sank into a troubled sleep.

About six he had tea, then began the packing of the few books that were to go with him, and of such other things as could be enclosed in box or portmanteau. After a couple of hours of this occupation he could no longer resist his weariness, so he went to bed. Before falling asleep he heard the two familiar clocks strike eight; this evening they were in unusual accord, and the querulous notes from the workhouse sounded between the deeper ones from St. Mary-lebone. Reardon tried to remember when he had last observed this; the matter seemed to have a peculiar interest for him, and in dreams he worried himself with a grotesque speculation thence derived.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE OLD HOME

BEFORE her marriage Mrs. Edmund Yule was one of seven motherless sisters who constituted the family of a dentist slenderly provided in the matter of income. The pinching and paring which was a chief employment of her energies in those early days had disagreeable effects upon a character disposed rather to generosity than the reverse; during her husband's lifetime she had enjoyed rather too eagerly all the good things which he put at her command, sometimes forgetting that a wife has duties as well as claims, and in her widowhood she indulged a pretentiousness and querulousness which were the natural, but not amiable, results of suddenly restricted circumstances.

Like the majority of London people, she occupied a house of which the rent absurdly exceeded the due proportion of her income, a pleasant foible turned to such good account by

London landlords. Whereas she might have lived with a good deal of modest comfort, her existence was a perpetual effort to conceal the squalid background of what was meant for the eyes of her friends and neighbours. She kept only two servants, who were so ill paid and so relentlessly overworked that it was seldom they remained with her for more than three months. In dealings with other people whom she perforce employed she was often guilty of incredible meanness ; as, for instance, when she obliged her half-starved dressmaker to purchase material for her, and then postponed payment alike for that and for the work itself to the last possible moment. This was not heartlessness in the strict sense of the word ; the woman not only knew that her behaviour was shameful, she was in truth ashamed of it and sorry for her victims. But life was a battle. She must either crush or be crushed. With sufficient means, she would have defrauded no one, and would have behaved generously to many ; with barely enough for her needs, she set her face and defied her feelings, inasmuch as she believed there was no choice.

She would shed tears over a pitiful story of want, and without shadow of hypocrisy. It was hard, it was cruel ; such things oughtn't to be

allowed in a world where there were so many rich people. The next day she would argue with her charwoman about halfpence, and end by paying the poor creature what she knew was inadequate and unjust. For the simplest reason : she hadn't more to give, without submitting to privations which she considered intolerable.

But whilst she could be a positive hyena to strangers, to those who were akin to her, and those of whom she was fond, her affectionate kindness was remarkable. One observes this peculiarity often enough ; it reminds one how savage the social conflict is, in which those little groups of people stand serried against their common enemies ; relentless to all others, among themselves only the more tender and zealous because of the ever-impending danger. No mother was ever more devoted. Her son, a gentleman of quite noteworthy selfishness, had board and lodging beneath her roof on nominal terms, and under no stress of pecuniary trouble had Mrs. Yule called upon him to make the slightest sacrifice on her behalf. Her daughter she loved with profound tenderness, and had no will that was opposed to Amy's. And it was characteristic of her that her children were never allowed to understand of what baseness she often became

guilty in the determination to support appearances. John Yule naturally suspected what went on behind the scenes; on one occasion—since Amy's marriage—he had involuntarily overheard a dialogue between his mother and a servant on the point of departing which made even him feel ashamed. But from Amy every paltriness and meanness had always been concealed with the utmost care; Mrs. Yule did not scruple to lie heroically when in danger of being detected by her daughter.

Yet this energetic lady had no social ambitions that pointed above her own stratum. She did not aim at intimacy with her superiors; merely at superiority among her intimates. Her circle was not large, but in that circle she must be regarded with the respect due to a woman of refined tastes and personal distinction. Her little dinners might be of rare occurrence, but to be invited must be felt a privilege. 'Mrs. Edmund Yule' must sound well on people's lips; never be the occasion of those peculiar smiles which she herself was rather fond of indulging at the mention of other people's names.

The question of Amy's marriage had been her constant thought from the time when the little girl shot into a woman grown. For Amy

no common match, no acceptance of a husband merely for money or position. Few men who walked the earth were mates for Amy. But years went on, and the man of undeniable distinction did not yet present himself. Suitors offered, but Amy smiled coldly at their addresses, in private not seldom scornfully, and her mother, though growing anxious, approved. Then of a sudden appeared Edwin Reardon.

A literary man? Well, it was one mode of distinction. Happily, a novelist; novelists now and then had considerable social success. Mr. Reardon, it was true, did not impress one as a man likely to push forward where the battle called for rude vigour, but Amy soon assured herself that he would have a reputation far other than that of the average successful storyteller. The best people would regard him; he would be welcomed in the penetralia of culture; superior persons would say: 'Oh, I don't read novels as a rule, but of course Mr. Reardon's——' If that really were to be the case, all was well; for Mrs. Yule could appreciate social and intellectual differences.

Alas! alas! What was the end of those shining anticipations?

First of all, Mrs. Yule began to make less frequent mention of 'my son-in-law, Mr. Edwin Reardon.' Next, she never uttered his name save when inquiries necessitated it. Then, the most intimate of her intimates received little hints which were not quite easy to interpret. 'Mr. Reardon is growing so very eccentric—has an odd distaste for society—occupies himself with all sorts of out-of-the-way interests. No, I'm afraid we shan't have another of his novels for some time. I think he writes anonymously a good deal. And really, such curious eccentricities!' Many were the tears she wept after her depressing colloquies with Amy; and, as was to be expected, she thought severely of the cause of these sorrows. On the last occasion when he came to her house she received him with such extreme civility that Reardon thenceforth disliked her, whereas before he had only thought her a good-natured and silly woman.

Alas for Amy's marriage with a man of distinction! From step to step of descent, till here was downright catastrophe. Bitter enough in itself, but most lamentable with reference to the friends of the family. How was it to be explained, this return of Amy to her home for several months, whilst her husband was no

further away than Worthing? The bald, horrible truth—impossible! Yet Mr. Milvain knew it, and the Carters must guess it. What colour could be thrown upon such vulgar distress?

The worst was not yet. It declared itself this May morning, when, quite unexpectedly, a cab drove up to the house, bringing Amy and her child, and her trunks, and her band-boxes, and her what-nots. From the dining-room window Mrs. Yule was aware of this arrival, and in a few moments she learnt the unspeakable cause.

She burst into tears, genuine as ever woman shed.

‘There’s no use in that, mother,’ said Amy, whose temper was in a dangerous state. ‘Nothing worse can happen, that’s one consolation.’

‘Oh, it’s disgraceful! disgraceful!’ sobbed Mrs. Yule. ‘What we are to say I can *not* think.’

‘I shall say nothing whatever. People can scarcely have the impertinence to ask us questions when we have shown that they are unwelcome.’

‘But there are some people I can’t help giving some explanation to. My dear child, he is not in his right mind. I’m convinced of it, there! He is *not* in his right mind.’

‘That’s nonsense, mother. He is as sane as I am.’

‘But you have often said what strange things he says and does; you know you have, Amy. That talking in his sleep; I’ve thought a great deal of it since you told me about that. And—and so many other things. My love, I shall give it to be understood that he has become so very odd in his ways that——’

‘I can’t have that,’ replied Amy with decision. ‘Don’t you see that in that case I should be behaving very badly?’

‘I can’t see that at all. There are many reasons, as you know very well, why one shouldn’t live with a husband who is at all suspected of mental derangement. You have done your utmost for him. And this would be some sort of explanation, you know. I am so convinced that there is truth in it, too.’

‘Of course I can’t prevent you from saying what you like, but I think it would be very wrong to start a rumour of this kind.’

There was less resolve in this utterance. Amy mused, and looked wretched.

‘Come up to the drawing-room, dear,’ said her mother, for they had held their conversation in the room nearest to the house-door. ‘What a state your mind must be in! Oh dear! Oh dear!’

She was a slender, well-proportioned woman,

still pretty in face, and dressed in a way that emphasised her abiding charms. Her voice had something of plaintiveness, and altogether she was of frailer type than her daughter.

‘Is my room ready?’ Amy inquired on the stairs.

‘I’m sorry to say it isn’t, dear, as I didn’t expect you till to-morrow. But it shall be seen to immediately.’

This addition to the household was destined to cause grave difficulties with the domestic slaves. But Mrs. Yule would prove equal to the occasion. On Amy’s behalf she would have worked her servants till they perished of exhaustion before her eyes.

‘Use my room for the present,’ she added. ‘I think the girl has finished up there. But wait here; I’ll just go and see to things.’

‘Things’ were not quite satisfactory, as it proved. You should have heard the change that came in that sweetly plaintive voice when it addressed the luckless housemaid. It was not brutal; not at all. But so sharp, hard, unrelenting—the voice of the goddess Poverty herself perhaps sounds like that.

Mad? Was he to be spoken of in a low voice, and with finger pointing to the forehead?

There was something ridiculous, as well as repugnant, in such a thought; but it kept possession of Amy's mind. She was brooding upon it when her mother came into the drawing-room.

‘And he positively refused to carry out the former plan?’

‘Refused. Said it was useless.’

‘How could it be useless? There's something so unaccountable in his behaviour.’

‘I don't think it unaccountable,’ replied Amy. ‘It's weak and selfish, that's all. He takes the first miserable employment that offers rather than face the hard work of writing another book.’

She was quite aware that this did not truly represent her husband's position. But an uneasiness of conscience impelled her to harsh speech.

‘But just fancy!’ exclaimed her mother. ‘What can he mean by asking you to go and live with him on twenty-five shillings a week? Upon my word, if his mind isn't disordered he must have made a deliberate plan to get rid of you.’

Amy shook her head.

‘You mean,’ asked Mrs. Yule, ‘that he really

thinks it possible for all of you to be supported on those wages?’

The last word was chosen to express the utmost scorn.

‘He talked of earning fifty pounds a year by writing.’

‘Even then it could only make about a hundred a year. My dear child, it’s one of two things: either he is out of his mind, or he has purposely cast you off.’

Amy laughed, thinking of her husband in the light of the latter alternative.

‘There’s no need to seek so far for explanations,’ she said. ‘He has failed, that’s all; just like a man might fail in any other business. He can’t write like he used to. It may be all the result of ill-health; I don’t know. His last book, you see, is positively refused. He has made up his mind that there’s nothing but poverty before him, and he can’t understand why I should object to live like the wife of a working-man.’

‘Well, I only know that he has placed you in an exceedingly difficult position. If he had gone away to Worthing for the summer we might have made it seem natural; people are always ready to allow literary men to do rather odd things—up to a certain point. We should have

behaved as if there were nothing that called for explanation. But what are we to do now?’

Like her multitudinous kind, Mrs. Yule lived only in the opinions of other people. What others would say was her ceaseless preoccupation. She had never conceived of life as something proper to the individual; independence in the directing of one's course seemed to her only possible in the case of very eccentric persons, or of such as were altogether out of society. Amy had advanced, intellectually, far beyond this standpoint, but lack of courage disabled her from acting upon her convictions.

‘People must know the truth, I suppose,’ she answered dispiritedly.

Now, confession of the truth was the last thing that would occur to Mrs. Yule when social relations were concerned. Her whole existence was based on bold denial of actualities. And, as is natural in such persons, she had the ostrich instinct strongly developed; though very acute in the discovery of her friends' shams and lies, she deceived herself ludicrously in the matter of concealing her own embarrassments.

‘But the fact is, my dear,’ she answered, ‘we don't know the truth ourselves. You had better let yourself be directed by me. It will

be better, at first, if you see as few people as possible. I suppose you must say something or other to two or three of your own friends; if you take my advice you'll be rather mysterious. Let them think what they like; anything is better than to say plainly: "My husband can't support me, and he has gone to work as a clerk for weekly wages." Be mysterious, darling; depend upon it, that's the safest.'

The conversation was pursued, with brief intervals, all through the day. In the afternoon two ladies paid a call, but Amy kept out of sight. Between six and seven John Yule returned from his gentlemanly occupations. As he was generally in a touchy temper before dinner had soothed him, nothing was said to him of the latest development of his sister's affairs until late in the evening; he was allowed to suppose that Reardon's departure for the seaside had taken place a day sooner than had been arranged.

Behind the dining-room was a comfortable little chamber set apart as John's sanctum; here he smoked and entertained his male friends, and contemplated the portraits of those female ones who would not have been altogether at their ease in Mrs. Yule's drawing-room. Not long

after dinner his mother and sister came to talk with him in this retreat.

With some nervousness Mrs. Yule made known to him what had taken place. Amy, the while, stood by the table, and glanced over a magazine that she had picked up.

‘Well, I see nothing to be surprised at,’ was John’s first remark. ‘It was pretty certain he’d come to this. But what I want to know is, how long are we to be at the expense of supporting Amy and her youngster?’

This was practical, and just what Mrs. Yule had expected from her son.

‘We can’t consider such things as that,’ she replied. ‘You don’t wish, I suppose, that Amy should go and live in a back street at Islington, and be hungry every other day, and soon have no decent clothes?’

‘I don’t think Jack would be greatly distressed,’ Amy put in quietly.

‘This is a woman’s way of talking,’ replied John. ‘I want to know what is to be the end of it all? I’ve no doubt it’s uncommonly pleasant for Reardon to shift his responsibilities on to our shoulders. At this rate I think I shall get married, and live beyond my means until I can hold out no longer, and then hand my wife

over to her relatives, with my compliments. It's about the coolest business that ever came under my notice.'

'But what is to be done?' asked Mrs. Yule. 'It's no use talking sarcastically, John, or making yourself disagreeable.'

'We are not called upon to find a way out of the difficulty. The fact of the matter is, Reardon must get a decent berth. Somebody or other must pitch him into the kind of place that suits men who can do nothing in particular. Carter ought to be able to help, I should think.'

'You know very well,' said Amy, 'that places of that kind are not to be had for the asking. It may be years before any such opportunity offers.'

'Confound the fellow! Why the deuce doesn't he go on with his novel-writing? There's plenty of money to be made out of novels.'

'But he can't write, Jack. He has lost his talent.'

'That's all bosh, Amy. If a fellow has once got into the swing of it he can keep it up if he likes. He might write his two novels a year easily enough, just like twenty other men and women. Look here, I could do it myself if I

weren't too lazy. And that's what's the matter with Reardon. He doesn't care to work.'

'I have thought that myself,' observed Mrs. Yule. 'It really is too ridiculous to say that he couldn't write some kind of novels if he chose. Look at Miss Blunt's last book; why, *anybody* could have written that. I'm sure there isn't a thing in it I couldn't have imagined myself.'

'Well, all I want to know is, what's Amy going to do if things don't alter?'

'She shall never want a home as long as I have one to share with her.'

John's natural procedure, when beset by difficulties, was to find fault with everyone all round, himself maintaining a position of irresponsibility.

'It's all very well, mother, but when a girl gets married she takes her husband, I have always understood, for better or worse, just as a man takes his wife. To tell the truth, it seems to me Amy has put herself in the wrong. It's deuced unpleasant to go and live in back streets, and to go without dinner now and then, but girls mustn't marry if they're afraid to face these things.'

'Don't talk so monstrously, John!' exclaimed his mother. 'How could Amy possibly foresee

such things? The case is quite an extraordinary one.'

'Not so uncommon, I assure you. Some one was telling me the other day of a married lady—well educated and blameless—who goes to work at a shop somewhere or other because her husband can't support her.'

'And you wish to see Amy working in a shop?'

'No, I can't say I do. I'm only telling you that her bad luck isn't unexampled. It's very fortunate for her that she has good-natured relatives.'

Amy had taken a seat apart. She sat with her head leaning on her hand.

'Why don't you go and see Reardon?' John asked of his mother.

'What would be the use? Perhaps he would tell me to mind my own business.'

'By jingo! precisely what you would be doing. I think you ought to see him and give him to understand that he's behaving in a confoundedly ungentlemanly way. Evidently he's the kind of fellow that wants stirring up. I've half a mind to go and see him myself. Where is this slum that he's gone to live in?'

'We don't know his address yet.'

‘So long as it’s not the kind of place where one would be afraid of catching a fever, I think it wouldn’t be amiss for me to look him up.’

‘You’ll do no good by that,’ said Amy, indifferently.

‘Confound it! It’s just because nobody does anything that things have come to this pass!’

The conversation was, of course, profitless. John could only return again and again to his assertion that Reardon must get ‘a decent berth.’ At length Amy left the room in weariness and disgust.

‘I suppose they have quarrelled terrifically,’ said her brother, as soon as she was gone.

‘I am afraid so.’

‘Well, you must do as you please. But it’s confounded hard lines that you should have to keep her and the kid. You know *I* can’t afford to contribute.’

‘My dear, I haven’t asked you to.’

‘No, but you’ll have the devil’s own job to make ends meet; I know that well enough.’

‘I shall manage somehow.’

‘All right; you’re a plucky woman, but it’s too bad. Reardon’s a humbug, that’s my opinion. I shall have a talk with Carter about

him. I suppose he has transferred all their furniture to the slum ? ’

‘ He can’t have removed yet. It was only this morning that he went to search for lodgings.’

‘ Oh, then I tell you what it is ; I shall look in there the first thing to-morrow morning, and just talk to him in a fatherly way. You needn’t say anything to Amy. But I see he’s just the kind of fellow that, if everyone leaves him alone, he’ll be content with Carter’s five-and-twenty shillings for the rest of his life, and never trouble his head about how Amy is living.’

To this proposal Mrs. Yule readily assented. On going upstairs she found that Amy had all but fallen asleep upon a settee in the drawing-room.

‘ You are quite worn out with your troubles,’ she said. ‘ Go to bed, and have a good long sleep.’

‘ Yes, I will.’

The neat, fresh bedchamber seemed to Amy a delightful haven of rest. She turned the key in the door with an enjoyment of the privacy thus secured such as she had never known in her life ; for in maidenhood safe solitude was a matter of course to her, and since marriage she had not passed a night alone. Willie was fast asleep in a little bed shadowed by her own. In an impulse of maternal love and gladness she bent over the

child and covered his face with kisses too gentle to awaken him.

How clean and sweet everything was! It is often said, by people who are exquisitely ignorant of the matter, that cleanliness is a luxury within reach even of the poorest. Very far from that; only with the utmost difficulty, with wearisome exertion, with harassing sacrifice, can people who are pinched for money preserve a moderate purity in their persons and their surroundings. By painful degrees Amy had accustomed herself to compromises in this particular which in the early days of her married life would have seemed intensely disagreeable, if not revolting. A housewife who lives in the country, and has but a patch of back garden, or even a good-sized kitchen, can, if she thinks fit, take her place at the wash-tub and relieve her mind on laundry matters; but to the inhabitant of a miniature flat in the heart of London anything of that kind is out of the question. When Amy began to cut down her laundress's bill, she did it with a sense of degradation. One grows accustomed, however, to such unpleasant necessities, and already she had learnt what was the minimum of expenditure for one who is troubled with a lady's instincts.

No, no; cleanliness is a costly thing, and a troublesome thing when appliances and means have to be improvised. It was, in part, the understanding she had gained of this side of the life of poverty that made Amy shrink in dread from the still narrower lodgings to which Reardon invited her. She knew how subtly one's self-respect can be undermined by sordid conditions. The difference between the life of well-to-do educated people and that of the uneducated poor is not greater in visible details than in the minutiae of privacy, and Amy must have submitted to an extraordinary change before it would have been possible for her to live at ease in the circumstances which satisfy a decent working-class woman. She was prepared for final parting from her husband rather than try to effect that change in herself.

She undressed at leisure, and stretched her limbs in the cold, soft, fragrant bed. A sigh of profound relief escaped her. How good it was to be alone!

And in a quarter of an hour she was sleeping as peacefully as the child who shared her room.

At breakfast in the morning she showed a bright, almost a happy face. It was long, long

since she had enjoyed such a night's rest, so undisturbed with unwelcome thoughts on the threshold of sleep and on awaking. Her life was perhaps wrecked, but the thought of that did not press upon her; for the present she must enjoy her freedom. It was like a recovery of girlhood. There are few married women who would not, sooner or later, accept with joy the offer of some months of a maidenly liberty. Amy would not allow herself to think that her wedded life was at an end. With a woman's strange faculty of closing her eyes against facts that do not immediately concern her, she tasted the relief of the present and let the future lie unregarded. Reardon would get out of his difficulties sooner or later; somebody or other would help him; that was the dim background of her agreeable sensations.

He suffered, no doubt. But then it was just as well that he should. Suffering would perhaps impel him to effort. When he communicated to her his new address—he could scarcely neglect to do that—she would send a not unfriendly letter, and hint to him that now was his opportunity for writing a book, as good a book as those which formerly issued from his garret-solitude. If he found that literature was

in truth a thing of the past with him, then he must exert himself to obtain a position worthy of an educated man. Yes, in this way she would write to him, without a word that could hurt or offend.

She ate an excellent breakfast, and made known her enjoyment of it.

‘I am so glad!’ replied her mother. ‘You have been getting quite thin and pale.’

‘Quite consumptive,’ remarked John, looking up from his newspaper. ‘Shall I make arrangements for a daily landau at the livery stables round here?’

‘You can if you like,’ replied his sister; ‘it would do both mother and me good, and I have no doubt you could afford it quite well.’

‘Oh indeed! You’re a remarkable young woman, let me tell you. By-the-by, I suppose your husband is breakfasting on bread and water?’

‘I hope not, and I don’t think it very likely.’

‘Jack, Jack!’ interposed Mrs. Yule, softly.

Her son resumed his paper, and at the end of the meal rose with an unwonted briskness to make his preparations for departure.

CHAPTER XIX

THE PAST REVIVED

NOR would it be true to represent Edwin Rear-don as rising to the new day wholly disconsolate. He too had slept unusually well, and with returning consciousness the sense of a burden removed was more instant than that of his loss and all the dreary circumstances attaching to it. He had no longer to fear the effects upon Amy of such a grievous change as from their home-like flat to the couple of rooms he had taken in Islington ; for the moment, this relief helped him to bear the pain of all that had happened and the uneasiness which troubled him when he reflected that his wife was henceforth a charge to her mother.

Of course for the moment only. He had no sooner begun to move about, to prepare his breakfast (amid the relics of last evening's meal), to think of all the detestable work he had to do before to-morrow night, than his heart sank

again. His position was well nigh as dolorous as that of any man who awoke that morning to the brutal realities of life. If only for the shame of it! How must they be speaking of him, Amy's relatives, and her friends? A novelist who couldn't write novels; a husband who couldn't support his wife and child; a literate who made eager application for illiterate work at paltry wages—how interesting it would all sound in humorous gossip! And what hope had he that things would ever be better with him?

Had he done well? Had he done wisely? Would it not have been better to have made that one last effort? There came before him a vision of quiet nooks beneath the Sussex cliffs, of the long lines of green breakers bursting into foam; he heard the wave-music, and tasted the briny freshness of the sea-breeze. Inspiration, after all, would perchance have come to him.

If Amy's love had but been of more enduring quality; if she had strengthened him for this last endeavour with the brave tenderness of an ideal wife! But he had seen such hateful things in her eyes. Her love was dead, and she regarded him as the man who had spoilt her hopes of happiness. It was only for her own sake that she urged him to strive on; let his be the

toil, that hers might be the advantage if he succeeded.

‘She would be glad if I were dead. She would be glad.’

He had the conviction of it. Oh yes, she would shed tears; they come so easily to women. But to have him dead and out of her way; to be saved from her anomalous position; to see once more a chance in life; she would welcome it.

But there was no time for brooding. To-day he had to sell all the things that were superfluous, and to make arrangements for the removal of his effects to-morrow. By Wednesday night, in accordance with his agreement, the flat must be free for the new occupier.

He had taken only two rooms, and fortunately as things were. Three would have cost more than he was likely to be able to afford for a long time. The rent of the two was to be six-and-sixpence; and how, if Amy had consented to come, could he have met the expenses of their living out of his weekly twenty-five shillings? How could he have pretended to do literary work in such cramped quarters, he who had never been able to write a line save in strict seclusion? In his despair he had faced the

impossible. Amy had shown more wisdom, though in a spirit of unkindness.

Towards ten o'clock he was leaving the flat to go and find people who would purchase his books and old clothing and other superfluities ; but before he could close the door behind him, an approaching step on the stairs caught his attention. He saw the shining silk hat of a well-equipped gentleman. It was John Yule.

'Ha! Good-morning!' John exclaimed, looking up. 'A minute or two and I should have been too late, I see.'

He spoke in quite a friendly way, and, on reaching the landing, shook hands.

'Are you obliged to go at once? Or could I have a word with you?'

'Come in.'

They entered the study, which was in some disorder; Reardon made no reference to circumstances, but offered a chair, and seated himself.

'Have a cigarette?' said Yule, holding out a box of them.

'No, thank you; I don't smoke so early.'

'Then I'll light one myself; it always makes talk easier to me. You're on the point of moving, I suppose?'

‘Yes, I am.’

Reardon tried to speak in quite a simple way, with no admission of embarrassment. He was not successful, and to his visitor the tone seemed rather offensive.

‘I suppose you’ll let Amy know your new address?’

‘Certainly. Why should I conceal it?’

‘No, no; I didn’t mean to suggest that. But you might be taking it for granted that—that the rupture was final, I thought.’

There had never been any intimacy between these two men. Reardon regarded his wife’s brother as rather snobbish and disagreeably selfish; John Yule looked upon the novelist as a prig, and now of late as a shuffling, untrustworthy fellow. It appeared to John that his brother-in-law was assuming a manner wholly unjustifiable, and he had a difficulty in behaving to him with courtesy. Reardon, on the other hand, felt injured by the turn his visitor’s remarks were taking, and began to resent the visit altogether.

‘I take nothing for granted,’ he said coldly. ‘But I’m afraid nothing is to be gained by a discussion of our difficulties. The time for that is over.’

‘I can’t quite see that. It seems to me that the time has just come.’

‘Please tell me, to begin with, do you come on Amy’s behalf?’

‘In a way, yes. She hasn’t sent me, but my mother and I are so astonished at what is happening that it was necessary for one or other of us to see you.’

‘I think it is all between Amy and myself.’

‘Difficulties between husband and wife are generally best left to the people themselves, I know. But the fact is, there are peculiar circumstances in the present case. It can’t be necessary for me to explain further.’

Reardon could find no suitable words of reply. He understood what Yule referred to, and began to feel the full extent of his humiliation.

‘You mean, of course——’ he began; but his tongue failed him.

‘Well, we should really like to know how long it is proposed that Amy shall remain with her mother.’

John was perfectly self-possessed; it took much to disturb his equanimity. He smoked his cigarette, which was in an amber mouth-piece, and seemed to enjoy its flavour. Reardon

found himself observing the perfection of the young man's boots and trousers.

‘That depends entirely on my wife herself,’ he replied mechanically.

‘How so?’

‘I offer her the best home I can.’

Reardon felt himself a poor, pitiful creature, and hated the well-dressed man who made him feel so.

‘But really, Reardon,’ began the other, uncrossing and recrossing his legs, ‘do you tell me in seriousness that you expect Amy to live in such lodgings as you can afford on a pound a week?’

‘I don’t. I said that I had offered her the best home I could. I know it’s impossible, of course.’

Either he must speak thus, or break into senseless wrath. It was hard to hold back the angry words that were on his lips, but he succeeded, and he was glad he had done so.

‘Then it doesn’t depend on Amy,’ said John.

‘I suppose not.’

‘You see no reason, then, why she shouldn’t live as at present for an indefinite time?’

To John, whose perspicacity was not remark-

able, Reardon's changed tone conveyed simply an impression of bland impudence. He eyed his brother-in-law rather haughtily.

'I can only say,' returned the other, who was become wearily indifferent, 'that as soon as I can afford a decent home I shall give my wife the opportunity of returning to me.'

'But, pray, when is that likely to be?'

John had passed the bounds; his manner was too frankly contemptuous.

'I see no right you have to examine me in this fashion,' Reardon exclaimed. 'With Mrs. Yule I should have done my best to be patient if she had asked these questions; but you are not justified in putting them, at all events not in this way.'

'I'm very sorry you speak like this, Reardon,' said the other, with calm insolence. 'It confirms unpleasant ideas, you know.'

'What do you mean?'

'Why, one can't help thinking that you are rather too much at your ease under the circumstances. It isn't exactly an everyday thing, you know, for a man's wife to be sent back to her own people——'

Reardon could not endure the sound of these words. He interrupted hotly.

‘I can’t discuss it with you. You are utterly unable to comprehend me and my position, utterly! It would be useless to defend myself. You must take whatever view seems to you the natural one.’

John, having finished his cigarette, rose.

‘The natural view is an uncommonly disagreeable one,’ he said. ‘However, I have no intention of quarrelling with you. I’ll only just say that, as I take a share in the expenses of my mother’s house, this question decidedly concerns me; and I’ll add that I think it ought to concern you a good deal more than it seems to.’

Reardon, ashamed already of his violence, paused upon these remarks.

‘It shall,’ he uttered at length, coldly. ‘You have put it clearly enough to me, and you shan’t have spoken in vain. Is there anything else you wish to say?’

‘Thank you; I think not.’

They parted with distant civility, and Reardon closed the door behind his visitor.

He knew that his character was seen through a distorting medium by Amy’s relatives, to some extent by Amy herself; but hitherto the reflection that this must always be the case when a man of his kind is judged by people of the world

had strengthened him in defiance. An endeavour to explain himself would be maddeningly hopeless; even Amy did not understand aright the troubles through which his intellectual and moral nature was passing, and to speak of such experiences to Mrs. Yule or to John would be equivalent to addressing them in alien tongues; he and they had no common criterion by reference to which he could make himself intelligible. The practical tone in which John had explained the opposing view of the situation made it impossible for him to proceed as he had purposed. Amy would never come to him in his poor lodgings; her mother, her brother, all her advisers would regard such a thing as out of the question. Very well; recognising this, he must also recognise his wife's claim upon him for material support. It was not in his power to supply her with means sufficient to live upon, but what he could afford she should have.

When he went out, it was with a different purpose from that of half an hour ago. After a short search in the direction of Edgware Road, he found a dealer in second-hand furniture, whom he requested to come as soon as possible to the flat on a matter of business. An hour

later the man kept his appointment. Having brought him into the study, Reardon said :

‘I wish to sell everything in this flat, with a few exceptions that I’ll point out to you.’

‘Very good, sir,’ was the reply. ‘Let’s have a look through the rooms.’

That the price offered would be strictly a minimum Reardon knew well enough. The dealer was a rough and rather dirty fellow, with the distrustful glance which distinguishes his class. Men of Reardon’s type, when hapless enough to be forced into vulgar commerce, are doubly at a disadvantage ; not only their ignorance, but their sensitiveness, makes them ready victims of even the least subtle man of business. To deal on equal terms with a person you must be able to assert with calm confidence that you are not to be cheated ; Reardon was too well aware that he would certainly be cheated, and shrank scornfully from the higgling of the market. Moreover, he was in a half-frenzied state of mind, and cared for little but to be done with the hateful details of this process of ruin.

He pencilled a list of the articles he must retain for his own use ; it would of course be cheaper to take a bare room than furnished lodgings, and every penny he could save was of

importance to him. The chair-bedstead, with necessary linen and blankets, a table, two chairs, a looking-glass—strictly the indispensable things; no need to complete the list. Then there were a few valuable wedding-presents, which belonged rather to Amy than to him; these he would get packed and send to Westbourne Park.

The dealer made his calculation, with many side-glances at the vendor.

‘And what may you ask for the lot?’

‘Please to make an offer.’

‘Most of the things has had a good deal of wear——’

‘I know, I know. Just let me hear what you will give.’

‘Well, if you want a valuation, I say eighteen pound ten.’

It was more than Reardon had expected, though much less than a man who understood such affairs would have obtained.

‘That’s the most you can give?’

‘Wouldn’t pay me to give a sixpence more. You see——’

He began to point out defects, but Reardon cut him short.

‘Can you take them away at once?’

‘ At wunst? Would two o’clock do?’

‘ Yes, it would.’

‘ And might you want these other things takin’ anywheres?’

‘ Yes, but not till to-morrow. They have to go to Islington. What would you do it for?’

This bargain also was completed, and the dealer went his way. Thereupon Reardon set to work to dispose of his books; by half-past one he had sold them for a couple of guineas. At two came the cart that was to take away the furniture, and at four o’clock nothing remained in the flat save what had to be removed on the morrow.

The next thing to be done was to go to Islington, forfeit a week’s rent for the two rooms he had taken, and find a single room at the lowest possible cost. On the way, he entered an eating-house and satisfied his hunger, for he had had nothing since breakfast. It took him a couple of hours to discover the ideal garret; it was found at length in a narrow little by-way running out of Upper Street. The rent was half a crown a week.

At seven o’clock he sat down in what once was called his study, and wrote the following letter:

‘Enclosed in this envelope you will find twenty pounds. I have been reminded that your relatives will be at the expense of your support ; it seemed best to me to sell the furniture, and now I send you all the money I can spare at present. You will receive to-morrow a box containing several things I did not feel justified in selling. As soon as I begin to have my payment from Carter, half of it shall be sent to you every week. My address is: 5 Manville Street, Upper Street, Islington.—EDWIN REARDON.’

He enclosed the money, in notes and gold, and addressed the envelope to his wife. She must receive it this very night, and he knew not how to insure that save by delivering it himself. So he went to Westbourne Park by train, and walked to Mrs. Yule’s house. At this hour the family were probably at dinner ; yes, the window of the dining-room showed lights within, whilst those of the drawing-room were in shadow. After a little hesitation he rang the servants’ bell. When the door opened, he handed his letter to the girl, and requested that it might be given to Mrs. Reardon as soon as possible. With one more hasty glance at the window—Amy was perhaps enjoying her unwonted comfort—he walked quickly away.

As he re-entered what had been his home, its bareness made his heart sink. An hour or two had sufficed for this devastation; nothing remained upon the uncarpeted floors but the needments he would carry with him into the wilderness, such few evidences of civilisation as the poorest cannot well dispense with. Anger, revolt, a sense of outraged love—all manner of confused passions had sustained him throughout this day of toil; now he had leisure to know how faint he was. He threw himself upon his chair-bedstead, and lay for more than an hour in torpor of body and mind.

But before he could sleep he must eat. Though it was cold, he could not exert himself to light a fire; there was some food still in the cupboard, and he consumed it in the fashion of a tired labourer, with the plate on his lap, using his fingers and a knife. What had he to do with delicacies?

He felt utterly alone in the world. Unless it were Biffen, what mortal would give him kindly welcome under any roof? These stripped rooms were symbolical of his life; losing money, he had lost everything. ‘Be thankful that you exist, that these morsels of food are still granted you. Man has a right to nothing in this world

that he cannot pay for. Did you imagine that love was an exception? Foolish idealist! Love is one of the first things to be frightened away by poverty. Go and live upon your twelve and sixpence a week, and on your memories of the past.'

In this room he had sat with Amy on their return from the wedding holiday. 'Shall you always love me as you do now?'—'For ever! for ever!'—'Even if I disappointed you? If I failed?'—'How could that affect my love?' The voices seemed to be lingering still, in a sad, faint echo, so short a time it was since those words were uttered.

His own fault. A man has no business to fail; least of all can he expect others to have time to look back upon him or pity him if he sink under the stress of conflict. Those behind will trample over his body; they can't help it; they themselves are borne onwards by resistless pressure.

He slept for a few hours, then lay watching the light of dawn as it revealed his desolation.

The morning's post brought him a large heavy envelope, the aspect of which for a moment puzzled him. But he recognised the handwriting, and understood. The editor of *The*

Wayside, in a pleasantly-written note, begged to return the paper on Pliny's Letters which had recently been submitted to him; he was sorry it did not strike him as quite so interesting as the other contributions from Reardon's pen.

This was a trifle. For the first time he received a rejected piece of writing without distress; he even laughed at the artistic completeness of the situation. The money would have been welcome, but on that very account he might have known it would not come.

The cart that was to transfer his property to the room in Islington arrived about mid-day. By that time he had dismissed the last details of business in relation to the flat, and was free to go back to the obscure world whence he had risen. He felt that for two years and a half he had been a pretender. It was not natural to him to live in the manner of people who enjoy an assured income; he belonged to the class of casual wage-earners. Back to obscurity!

Carrying a bag which contained a few things best kept in his own care he went by train to King's Cross, and thence walked up Pentonville Hill to Upper Street and his own little by-way. Manville Street was not unreasonably squalid;

the house in which he had found a home was not alarming in its appearance, and the woman who kept it had an honest face. Amy would have shrunk in apprehension, but to one who had experience of London garrets this was a rather favourable specimen of its kind. The door closed more satisfactorily than poor Biffen's, for instance, and there were not many of those knot-holes in the floor which give admission to piercing little draughts; not a pane of the window was cracked, not one. A man might live here comfortably—could memory be destroyed.

‘There’s a letter come for you,’ said the landlady as she admitted him. ‘You’ll find it on your mantel.’

He ascended hastily. The letter must be from Amy, as no one else knew his address. Yes, and its contents were these :

‘As you have really sold the furniture, I shall accept half this money that you send. I must buy clothing for myself and Willie. But the other ten pounds I shall return to you as soon as possible. As for your offer of half what you are to receive from Mr. Carter, that seems to me ridiculous; in any case, I cannot take it. If you seriously abandon all further hope from

literature, I think it is your duty to make every effort to obtain a position suitable to a man of your education.—AMY REARDON.'

Doubtless Amy thought it was her duty to write in this way. Not a word of sympathy; he must understand that no one was to blame but himself, and that her hardships were equal to his own.

In the bag he had brought with him there were writing materials. Standing at the mantelpiece, he forthwith penned a reply to this letter :

'The money is for your support, as far as it will go. If it comes back to me I shall send it again. If you refuse to make use of it, you will have the kindness to put it aside and consider it as belonging to Willie. The other money of which I spoke will be sent to you once a month. As our concerns are no longer between us alone, I must protect myself against anyone who would be likely to accuse me of not giving you what I could afford. For your advice I thank you, but remember that in withdrawing from me your affection you have lost all right to offer me counsel.'

He went out and posted this at once.

By three o'clock the furniture of his room was arranged. He had not kept a carpet; that was luxury, and beyond his due. His score of volumes must rank upon the mantelpiece; his clothing must be kept in the trunk. Cups, plates, knives, forks, and spoons would lie in the little open cupboard, the lowest section of which was for his supply of coals. When everything was in order he drew water from a tap on the landing and washed himself; then, with his bag, went out to make purchases. A loaf of bread, butter, sugar, condensed milk; a remnant of tea he had brought with him. On returning, he lit as small a fire as possible, put on his kettle, and sat down to meditate.

How familiar it all was to him! And not unpleasant, for it brought back the days when he had worked to such good purpose. It was like a restoration of youth.

Of Amy he would not think. Knowing his bitter misery, she could write to him in cold, hard words, without a touch even of womanly feeling. If ever they were to meet again, the advance must be from her side. He had no more tenderness for her until she strove to revive it.

Next morning he called at the hospital to see

Carter. The secretary's peculiar look and smile seemed to betray a knowledge of what had been going on since Sunday, and his first words confirmed this impression of Reardon's.

‘You have removed, I hear?’

‘Yes; I had better give you my new address.’

Reardon's tone was meant to signify that further remark on the subject would be unwelcome. Musingly, Carter made a note of the address.

‘You still wish to go on with this affair?’

‘Certainly.’

‘Come and have some lunch with me, then, and afterwards we'll go to the City Road and talk things over on the spot.’

The vivacious young man was not quite so genial as of wont, but he evidently strove to show that the renewal of their relations as employer and clerk would make no difference in the friendly intercourse which had since been established; the invitation to lunch evidently had this purpose.

‘I suppose,’ said Carter, when they were seated in a restaurant, ‘you wouldn't object to anything better, if a chance turned up?’

‘I should take it, to be sure.’

‘But you don’t want a job that would occupy all your time? You’re going on with writing, of course?’

‘Not for the present, I think.’

‘Then you would like me to keep a look-out? I haven’t anything in view—nothing whatever. But one hears of things sometimes.’

‘I should be obliged to you if you could help me to anything satisfactory.’

Having brought himself to this admission, Reardon felt more at ease. To what purpose should he keep up transparent pretences? It was manifestly his duty to earn as much money as he could, in whatever way. Let the man of letters be forgotten; he was seeking for remunerative employment, just as if he had never written a line.

Amy did not return the ten pounds, and did not write again. So, presumably, she would accept the moiety of his earnings; he was glad of it. After paying half a crown for rent, there would be left ten shillings. Something like three pounds that still remained to him he would not reckon; this must be for casualties. Half a sovereign was enough for his needs; in the old times he had counted it a competency which put his mind quite at rest.

The day came, and he entered upon his duties in City Road. It needed but an hour or two, and all the intervening time was cancelled; he was back once more in the days of no reputation, a harmless clerk, a decent wage-earner.

CHAPTER XX

THE END OF WAITING

It was more than a fortnight after Reardon's removal to Islington when Jasper Milvain heard for the first time of what had happened. He was coming down from the office of the *Will-o'-the-Wisp* one afternoon, after a talk with the editor concerning a paragraph in his last week's *causerie* which had been complained of as libellous, and which would probably lead to the 'case' so much desired by everyone connected with the paper, when someone descending from a higher storey of the building overtook him and laid a hand on his shoulder. He turned and saw Whelpdale.

'What brings you on these premises?' he asked as they shook hands.

'A man I know has just been made sub-editor of *Chat*, upstairs. He has half promised to let me do a column of answers to correspondents.'

'Cosmetics? Fashions? Cookery?'

'I'm not so versatile as all that, unfortunately.'

No, the general information column. "Will you be so good as to inform me, through the medium of your invaluable paper, what was the exact area devastated by the Great Fire of London?"—that kind of thing, you know. Hopburn—that's the fellow's name—tells me that his predecessor always called the paper *Chat-moss*, because of the frightful difficulty he had in filling it up each week. By-the-by, what a capital column that is of yours in *Will-o'-the-Wisp*. I know nothing like it in English journalism; upon my word I don't!

'Glad you like it. Some people are less fervent in their admiration.'

Jasper recounted the affair which had just been under discussion in the office.

'It may cost a couple of thousands, but the advertisement is worth that, Patwin thinks. Barlow is delighted; he wouldn't mind paying double the money to make those people a laughing-stock for a week or two.'

They issued into the street, and walked on together; Milvain, with his keen eye and critical smile, unmistakably the modern young man who cultivates the art of success; his companion of a less pronounced type, but distinguished by a certain subtlety of countenance,

a blending of the sentimental and the shrewd.

‘Of course you know all about the Reardons?’ said Whelpdale.

‘Haven’t seen or heard of them lately. What is it?’

‘Then you don’t know that they have parted?’

‘Parted?’

‘I only heard about it last night; Biffen told me. Reardon is doing clerk’s work at a hospital somewhere in the East-end, and his wife has gone to live at her mother’s house.’

‘Ho, ho!’ exclaimed Jasper, thoughtfully. ‘Then the crash has come. Of course I knew it must be impending. I’m sorry for Reardon.’

‘I’m sorry for his wife.’

‘Trust you for thinking of women first, Whelpdale.’

‘It’s in an honourable way, my dear fellow. I’m a slave to women, true, but all in an honourable way. After that last adventure of mine most men would be savage and cynical, wouldn’t they, now? I’m nothing of the kind. I think no worse of women—not a bit. I reverence them as much as ever. There must be a good deal of magnanimity in me, don’t you think?’

Jasper laughed unrestrainedly.

‘But it’s the simple truth,’ pursued the other. ‘You should have seen the letter I wrote to that girl at Birmingham—all charity and forgiveness. I meant it; every word of it. I shouldn’t talk to everyone like this, you know; but it’s as well to show a friend one’s best qualities now and then.’

‘Is Reardon still living at the old place?’

‘No, no. They sold up everything and let the flat. He’s in lodgings somewhere or other. I’m not quite intimate enough with him to go and see him under the circumstances. But I’m surprised you know nothing about it.’

‘I haven’t seen much of them this year. Reardon—well, I’m afraid he hasn’t very much of the virtue you claim for yourself. It rather annoys him to see me going ahead.’

‘Really? His character never struck me in that way.’

‘You haven’t come enough in contact with him. At all events, I can’t explain his change of manner in any other way. But I’m sorry for him; I am, indeed. At a hospital? I suppose Carter has given him the old job again?’

‘Don’t know. Biffen doesn’t talk very freely about it; there’s a good deal of delicacy in

Biffen, you know. A thoroughly good-hearted fellow. And so is Reardon, I believe, though no doubt he has his weaknesses.'

'Oh, an excellent fellow! But weakness isn't the word. Why, I foresaw all this from the very beginning. The first hour's talk I ever had with him was enough to convince me that he'd never hold his own. But he really believed that the future was clear before him; he imagined he'd go on getting more and more for his books. An extraordinary thing that that girl had such faith in him!'

They parted soon after this, and Milvain went homeward, musing upon what he had heard. It was his purpose to spend the whole evening on some work which pressed for completion, but he found an unusual difficulty in settling to it. About eight o'clock he gave up the effort, arrayed himself in the costume of black and white, and journeyed to Westbourne Park, where his destination was the house of Mrs. Edmund Yule. Of the servant who opened to him he inquired if Mrs. Yule was at home, and received an answer in the affirmative.

'Any company with her?'

A lady—Mrs. Carter.'

‘Then please to give my name, and ask if Mrs. Yule can see me.’

He was speedily conducted to the drawing-room, where he found the lady of the house, her son, and Mrs. Carter. For Mrs. Reardon his eye sought in vain.

‘I’m so glad you have come,’ said Mrs. Yule, in a confidential tone. ‘I have been wishing to see you. Of course, you know of our sad trouble?’

‘I have heard of it only to-day.’

‘From Mr. Reardon himself?’

‘No ; I haven’t seen him.’

‘I do wish you had ! We should have been so anxious to know how he impressed you.’

‘How he impressed me?’

‘My mother has got hold of the notion,’ put in John Yule, ‘that he’s not exactly *compos mentis*. I’ll admit that he went on in a queer sort of way the last time I saw him.’

‘And my husband thinks he is rather strange,’ remarked Mrs. Carter.

‘He has gone back to the hospital, I understand——’

‘To a new branch that has just been opened in the City Road,’ replied Mrs. Yule. ‘And he’s living in a dreadful place—one of the most

shocking alleys in the worst part of Islington. I should have gone to see him, but I really feel afraid; they give me such an account of the place. And everyone agrees that he has such a very wild look, and speaks so strangely.'

'Between ourselves,' said John, 'there's no use in exaggerating. He's living in a vile hole, that's true, and Carter says he looks miserably ill, but of course he may be as sane as we are.'

Jasper listened to all this with no small astonishment.

'And Mrs. Reardon?' he asked.

'I'm sorry to say she is far from well,' replied Mrs. Yule. 'To-day she has been obliged to keep her room. You can imagine what a shock it has been to her. It came with such extraordinary suddenness. Without a word of warning, her husband announced that he had taken a clerkship and was going to remove immediately to the East-end. Fancy! And this when he had already arranged, as you know, to go to the south coast and write his next book under the influences of the sea air. He was anything but well; we all knew that, and we had all joined in advising him to spend the summer at the seaside. It seemed better that he should go alone; Mrs. Reardon would, of

course, have gone down for a few days now and then. And at a moment's notice everything is changed, and in such a dreadful way! I *cannot* believe that this is the behaviour of a sane man!

Jasper understood that an explanation of the matter might have been given in much more homely terms; it was natural that Mrs. Yule should leave out of sight the sufficient, but ignoble, cause of her son-in-law's behaviour.

'You see in what a painful position we are placed,' continued the euphemistic lady. 'It is so terrible even to hint that Mr. Reardon is not responsible for his actions, yet how are we to explain to our friends this extraordinary state of things?'

'My husband is afraid Mr. Reardon may fall seriously ill,' said Mrs. Carter. 'And how dreadful! In such a place as that!'

'It would be so kind of you to go and see him, Mr. Milvain,' urged Mrs. Yule. 'We should be so glad to hear what you think.'

'Certainly, I will go,' replied Jasper. 'Will you give me his address?'

He remained for an hour, and before his departure the subject was discussed with rather more frankness than at first; even the word 'money' was once or twice heard.

‘Mr. Carter has very kindly promised,’ said Mrs. Yule, ‘to do his best to hear of some position that would be suitable. It seems a most shocking thing that a successful author should abandon his career in this deliberate way; who could have imagined anything of the kind two years ago? But it is clearly quite impossible for him to go on as at present—if there is really no reason for believing his mind disordered.’

A cab was summoned for Mrs. Carter, and she took her leave, suppressing her native cheerfulness to the tone of the occasion. A minute or two after, Milvain left the house.

He had walked perhaps twenty yards, almost to the end of the silent street in which his friends’ house was situated, when a man came round the corner and approached him. At once he recognised the figure, and in a moment he was face to face with Reardon. Both stopped. Jasper held out his hand, but the other did not seem to notice it.

‘You are coming from Mrs. Yule’s?’ said Reardon, with a strange smile.

By the gaslight his face showed pale and sunken, and he met Jasper’s look with fixedness.

‘Yes, I am. The fact is, I went there to

hear of your address. Why haven't you let me know about all this?'

'You went to the flat?'

'No, I was told about you by Whelpdale.'

Reardon turned in the direction whence he had come, and began to walk slowly; Jasper kept beside him.

'I'm afraid there's something amiss between us, Reardon,' said the latter, just glancing at his companion.

'There's something amiss between me and everyone,' was the reply, in an unnatural voice.

'You look at things too gloomily. Am I detaining you, by-the-by? You were going——'

'Nowhere.'

'Then come to my rooms, and let us see if we can't talk more in the old way.'

'Your old way of talk isn't much to my taste, Milvain. It has cost me too much.'

Jasper gazed at him. Was there some foundation for Mrs. Yule's seeming extravagance? This reply sounded so meaningless, and so unlike Reardon's manner of speech, that the younger man experienced a sudden alarm.

'Cost you too much? I don't understand you.'

They had turned into a broader thoroughfare, which, however, was little frequented at

this hour. Reardon, his hands thrust into the pockets of a shabby overcoat and his head bent forward, went on at a slow pace, observant of nothing. For a moment or two he delayed reply, then said in an unsteady voice :

‘Your way of talking has always been to glorify success, to insist upon it as the one end a man ought to keep in view. If you had talked so to me alone, it wouldn’t have mattered. But there was generally someone else present. Your words had their effect ; I can see that now. It’s very much owing to you that I am deserted, now that there’s no hope of my ever succeeding.’

Jasper’s first impulse was to meet this accusation with indignant denial, but a sense of compassion prevailed. It was so painful to see the defeated man wandering at night near the house where his wife and child were comfortably sheltered ; and the tone in which he spoke revealed such profound misery.

‘That’s a most astonishing thing to say,’ Jasper replied. ‘Of course I know nothing of what has passed between you and your wife, but I feel certain that I have no more to do with what has happened than any other of your acquaintances.’

‘You may feel as certain as you will, but

your words and your example have influenced my wife against me. You didn't intend that ; I don't suppose it for a moment. It's my misfortune, that's all.'

'That I intended nothing of the kind, you need hardly say, I should think. But you are deceiving yourself in the strangest way. I'm afraid to speak plainly ; I'm afraid of offending you. But can you recall something that I said about the time of your marriage? You didn't like it then, and certainly it won't be pleasant to you to remember it now. If you mean that your wife has grown unkind to you because you are unfortunate, there's no need to examine into other people's influence for an explanation of that.'

Reardon turned his face towards the speaker.

'Then you have always regarded my wife as a woman likely to fail me in time of need?'

'I don't care to answer a question put in that way. If we are no longer to talk with the old friendliness, it's far better we shouldn't discuss things such as this.'

'Well, practically you have answered. Of course I remember those words of yours that you refer to. Whether you were right or wrong doesn't affect what I say.'

He spoke with a dull doggedness, as though mental fatigue did not allow him to say more.

‘It’s impossible to argue against such a charge,’ said Milvain. ‘I am convinced it isn’t true, and that’s all I can answer. But perhaps you think this extraordinary influence of mine is still being used against you?’

‘I know nothing about it,’ Reardon replied, in the same unmodulated voice.

‘Well, as I have told you, this was my first visit to Mrs. Yule’s since your wife has been there, and I didn’t see her; she isn’t very well, and keeps her room. I’m glad it happened so—that I didn’t meet her. Henceforth I shall keep away from the family altogether, so long, at all events, as your wife remains with them. Of course I shan’t tell anyone why; that would be impossible. But you shan’t have to fear that I am decrying you. By Jove! an amiable figure you make of me!’

‘I have said what I didn’t wish to say, and what I oughtn’t to have said. You must misunderstand me; I can’t help it.’

Reardon had been walking for hours, and was, in truth, exhausted. He became mute. Jasper, whose misrepresentation was wilful, though not maliciously so, also fell into silence;

he did not believe that his conversations with Amy had seriously affected the course of events, but he knew that he had often said things to her in private which would scarcely have fallen from his lips if her husband had been present—little depreciatory phrases, wrong rather in tone than in terms, which came of his irresistible desire to assume superiority whenever it was possible. He, too, was weak, but with quite another kind of weakness than Reardon's. His was the weakness of vanity, which sometimes leads a man to commit treacheries of which he would believe himself incapable. Self-accused, he took refuge in the pretence of misconception, which again was a betrayal of littleness.

They drew near to Westbourne Park station.

‘You are living a long way from here,’ Jasper said, coldly. ‘Are you going by train?’

‘No. You said my wife was ill?’

‘Oh, not ill. At least, I didn't understand that it was anything serious. Why don't you walk back to the house?’

‘I must judge of my own affairs.’

‘True; I beg your pardon. I take the train here, so I'll say good-night.’

They nodded to each other, but did not shake hands.

A day or two later, Milvain wrote to Mrs. Yule, and told her that he had seen Reardon; he did not describe the circumstances under which the interview had taken place, but gave it as his opinion that Reardon was in a state of nervous illness, and made by suffering quite unlike himself. That he might be on the way to positive mental disease seemed likely enough. 'Unhappily, I myself can be of no use to him; he has not the same friendly feeling for me as he used to have. But it is very certain that those of his friends who have the power should exert themselves to raise him out of this fearful slough of despond. If he isn't effectually helped, there's no saying what may happen. One thing is certain, I think: he is past helping himself. Sane literary work cannot be expected from him. It seems a monstrous thing that so good a fellow, and one with such excellent brains too, should perish by the way when influential people would have no difficulty in restoring him to health and usefulness.'

All the months of summer went by. Jasper kept his word, and never visited Mrs. Yule's house; but once in July he met that lady at the Carters', and heard then, what he knew from other sources, that the position of things was

unchanged. In August, Mrs. Yule spent a fortnight at the seaside, and Amy accompanied her. Milvain and his sisters accepted an invitation to visit friends at Wattleborough, and were out of town about three weeks, the last ten days being passed in the Isle of Wight; it was an extravagant holiday, but Dora had been ailing, and her brother declared that they would all work better for the change. Alfred Yule, with his wife and daughter, rusticated somewhere in Kent. Dora and Marian exchanged letters, and here is a passage from one written by the former :

‘Jasper has shown himself in an unusually amiable light since we left town. I looked forward to this holiday with some misgivings, as I know by experience that it doesn’t do for him and us to be too much together; he gets tired of our company, and then his selfishness—believe me, he has a good deal of it—comes out in a way we don’t appreciate. But I have never known him so forbearing. To me he is particularly kind, on account of my headaches and general shakiness. It isn’t impossible that this young man, if all goes well with him, may turn out far better than Maud and I ever expected. But things will have to go *very* well, if the improvement is to be permanent. I only hope he

may make a lot of money before long. If this sounds rather gross to you, I can only say that Jasper's moral nature will never be safe as long as he is exposed to the risks of poverty. There *are* such people, you know. As a poor man, I wouldn't trust him out of my sight ; with money, he will be a tolerable creature—as men go.'

Dora, no doubt, had her reasons for writing in this strain. She would not have made such remarks in conversation with her friend, but took the opportunity of being at a distance to communicate them in writing.

On their return, the two girls made good progress with the book they were manufacturing for Messrs. Jolly and Monk, and early in October it was finished. Dora was now writing little things for *The English Girl*, and Maud had begun to review an occasional novel for an illustrated paper. In spite of their poor lodgings, they had been brought into social relations with Mrs. Boston Wright and a few of her friends ; their position was understood, and in accepting invitations they had no fear lest unwelcome people should pounce down upon them in their shabby little sitting-room. The younger sister cared little for society such as Jasper procured them ; with Marian Yule for a companion she

would have been quite content to spend her evenings at home. But Maud relished the introduction to strangers. She was admired, and knew it. Prudence could not restrain her from buying a handsomer dress than those she had brought from her country home, and it irked her sorely that she might not reconstruct all her equipment to rival the appearance of well-to-do girls whom she studied and envied. Her disadvantages, for the present, were insuperable. She had no one to chaperon her; she could not form intimacies because of her poverty. A rare invitation to luncheon, a permission to call at the sacred hour of small-talk—this was all she could hope for.

‘I advise you to possess your soul in patience,’ Jasper said to her, as they talked one day on the sea-shore. ‘You are not to blame that you live without conventional protection, but it necessitates your being very careful. These people you are getting to know are not rigid about social observances, and they won’t exactly despise you for poverty; all the same, their charity mustn’t be tested too severely. Be very quiet for the present; let it be seen that you understand that your position isn’t quite regular—I mean, of course, do so in a modest

and nice way. As soon as ever it's possible, we'll arrange for you to live with someone who will preserve appearances. All this is contemptible, of course; but we belong to a contemptible society, and can't help ourselves. For Heaven's sake, don't spoil your chances by rashness; be content to wait a little, till some more money comes in.'

Midway in October, about half-past eight one evening, Jasper received an unexpected visit from Dora. He was in his sitting-room, smoking and reading a novel.

'Anything wrong?' he asked, as his sister entered.

'No; but I'm alone this evening, and I thought I would see if you were in.'

'Where's Maud, then?'

'She went to see the Lanes this afternoon, and Mrs. Lane invited her to go to the Gaiety to-night; she said a friend whom she had invited couldn't come, and the ticket would be wasted. Maud went back to dine with them. She'll come home in a cab.'

'Why is Mrs. Lane so affectionate all at once? Take your things off; I have nothing to do.'

'Miss Radway was going as well.'

‘Who’s Miss Radway?’

‘Don’t you know her? She’s staying with the Lanes. Maud says she writes for *The West End*.’

‘And will that fellow Lane be with them?’

‘I think not.’

Jasper mused, contemplating the bowl of his pipe.

‘I suppose she was in rare excitement?’

‘Pretty well. She has wanted to go to the Gaiety for a long time. There’s no harm, is there?’

Dora asked the question with that absent air which girls are wont to assume when they touch on doubtful subjects.

‘Harm, no. Idiocy and lively music, that’s all. It’s too late, or I’d have taken you, for the joke of the thing. Confound it! she ought to have better dresses.’

‘Oh, she looked very nice, in that best.’

‘Pooh! But I don’t care for her to be running about with the Lanes. Lane is too big a blackguard; it reflects upon his wife to a certain extent.’

They gossiped for half an hour, then a tap at the door interrupted them; it was the landlady.

‘Mr. Whelpdale has called to see you, sir. I mentioned as Miss Milvain was here, so he said he wouldn’t come up unless you sent to ask him.’

Jasper smiled at Dora, and said in a low voice :

‘What do you say? Shall he come up? He can behave himself.’

‘Just as you please, Jasper.’

‘Ask him to come up, Mrs. Thompson, please.’

Mr. Whelpdale presented himself. He entered with much more ceremony than when Milvain was alone; on his visage was a grave respectfulness, his step was light, his whole bearing expressed diffidence and pleasurable anticipation.

‘My younger sister, Whelpdale,’ said Jasper, with subdued amusement.

The dealer in literary advice made a bow which did him no discredit, and began to speak in a low, reverential tone not at all disagreeable to the ear. His breeding, in truth, had been that of a gentleman, and it was only of late years that he had fallen into the hungry region of New Grub Street.

‘How’s the “Manual” going off?’ Milvain inquired.

‘Excellently ! We have sold nearly six hundred.’

‘My sister is one of your readers. I believe she has studied the book with much conscientiousness.’

‘Really ? You have really read it, Miss Milvain ?

Dora assured him that she had, and his delight knew no bounds.

‘It isn’t all rubbish, by any means,’ said Jasper, graciously. ‘In the chapter on writing for magazines, there are one or two very good hints. What a pity you can’t apply your own advice, Whelpdale !’

‘Now that’s horribly unkind of you !’ protested the other. ‘You might have spared me this evening. But unfortunately it’s quite true, Miss Milvain. I point the way, but I haven’t been able to travel it myself. You mustn’t think I have never succeeded in getting things published ; but I can’t keep it up as a profession. Your brother is the successful man. A marvellous facility ! I envy him. Few men at present writing have such talent.’

‘Please don’t make him more conceited than he naturally is,’ interposed Dora.

‘What news of Biffen?’ asked Jasper, presently.

‘He says he shall finish “Mr. Bailey, Grocer,” in about a month. He read me one of the later chapters the other night. It’s really very fine; most remarkable writing, it seems to me. It will be scandalous if he can’t get it published; it will, indeed.’

‘I do hope he may!’ said Dora, laughing. ‘I have heard so much of “Mr. Bailey,” that it will be a great disappointment if I am never to read it.’

‘I’m afraid it would give you very little pleasure,’ Whelpdale replied, hesitatingly. ‘The matter is so very gross.’

‘And the hero *grocer*!’ shouted Jasper, mirthfully. ‘Oh, but it’s quite decent; only rather depressing. The decently ignoble—or, the ignobly decent? Which is Biffen’s formula? I saw him a week ago, and he looked hungrier than ever.’

‘Ah, but poor Reardon! I passed him at King’s Cross not long ago. He didn’t see me—walks with his eyes on the ground always,—and I hadn’t the courage to stop him. He’s the ghost of his old self. He can’t live long.’

Dora and her brother exchanged a glance. It was a long time since Jasper had spoken to his sisters about the Reardons; nowadays he seldom heard either of husband or wife.

The conversation that went on was so agreeable to Whelpdale, that he lost consciousness of time. It was past eleven o'clock when Jasper felt obliged to remind him.

'Dora, I think I must be taking you home.'

The visitor at once made ready for departure, and his leave-taking was as respectful as his entrance had been. Though he might not say what he thought, there was very legible upon his countenance a hope that he would again be privileged to meet Miss Dora Milvain.

'Not a bad fellow, in his way,' said Jasper, when Dora and he were alone again.

'Not at all.'

She had heard the story of Whelpdale's hapless wooing half a year ago, and her recollection of it explained the smile with which she spoke.

'Never get on, I'm afraid,' Jasper pursued. 'He has his allowance of twenty pounds a year, and makes perhaps fifty or sixty more. If I were in his position, I should go in for some kind of regular business; he has people who

could help him. Good-natured fellow ; but what's the use of that if you've no money ?'

They set out together, and walked to the girls' lodgings. Dora was about to use her latch-key, but Jasper checked her.

'No. There's a light in the kitchen still ; better knock, as we're so late.'

'But why ?'

'Never mind ; do as I tell you.'

The landlady admitted them, and Jasper spoke a word or two with her, explaining that he would wait until his elder sister's return ; the darkness of the second-floor windows had shown that Maud was not yet back.

'What strange fancies you have !' remarked Dora, when they were upstairs.

'So have people in general, unfortunately.'

A letter lay on the table. It was addressed to Maud, and Dora recognised the handwriting as that of a Wattleborough friend.

'There must be some news here,' she said. 'Mrs. Haynes wouldn't write unless she had something special to say.'

Just upon midnight, a cab drew up before the house. Dora ran down to open the door to her sister, who came in with very bright eyes and more colour than usual on her cheeks.

‘How late for you to be here!’ she exclaimed, on entering the sitting-room and seeing Jasper.

‘I shouldn’t have felt comfortable till I knew that you were back all right.’

‘What fear was there?’

She threw off her wraps, laughing.

‘Well, have you enjoyed yourself?’

‘Oh yes!’ she replied, carelessly. ‘This letter for me? What has Mrs. Haynes got to say, I wonder?’

She opened the envelope, and began to glance hurriedly over the sheet of paper. Then her face changed.

‘What do you think? Mr. Yule is dead!’

Dora uttered an exclamation; Jasper displayed the keenest interest.

‘He died yesterday—no, it would be the day before yesterday. He had a fit of some kind at a public meeting, was taken to the hospital because it was nearest, and died in a few hours. So *that* has come, at last! Now what’ll be the result of it, I wonder?’

‘When shall you be seeing Marian?’ asked her brother.

‘She might come to-morrow evening.’

‘But won’t she go to the funeral?’ suggested Dora.

‘Perhaps; there’s no saying. I suppose her father will, at all events. The day before yesterday? Then the funeral will be on Saturday, I should think.’

‘Ought I to write to Marian?’ asked Dora.

‘No; I wouldn’t,’ was Jasper’s reply. ‘Better wait till she lets you hear. That’s sure to be soon. She may have gone to Wattleborough this afternoon, or be going to-morrow morning.’

The letter from Mrs. Haynes was passed from hand to hand. ‘Everybody feels sure,’ it said, ‘that a great deal of his money will be left for public purposes. The ground for the park being already purchased, he is sure to have made provision for carrying out his plans connected with it. But I hope your friends in London may benefit.’

It was some time before Jasper could put an end to the speculative conversation and betake himself homewards. And even on getting back to his lodgings he was little disposed to go to bed. This event of John Yule’s death had been constantly in his mind, but there was always a fear that it might not happen for long enough;

the sudden announcement excited him almost as much as if he were a relative of the deceased.

‘Confound his public purposes!’ was the thought upon which he at length slept.

CHAPTER XXI

MR. YULE LEAVES TOWN

SINCE the domestic incidents connected with that unpleasant review in *The Current*, the relations between Alfred Yule and his daughter had suffered a permanent change, though not in a degree noticeable by any one but the two concerned. To all appearances, they worked together and conversed very much as they had been wont to do ; but Marian was made to feel in many subtle ways that her father no longer had complete confidence in her, no longer took the same pleasure as formerly in the skill and conscientiousness of her work, and Yule on his side perceived too clearly that the girl was pre-occupied with something other than her old wish to aid and satisfy him, that she had a new life of her own alien to, and in some respects irreconcilable with, the existence in which he desired to confirm her. There was no renewal of open disagreement, but their conversations

frequently ended, by tacit mutual consent, at a point which threatened divergence ; and in Yule's case every such warning was a cause of intense irritation. He feared to provoke Marian, and this fear was again a torture to his pride.

Beyond the fact that his daughter was in constant communication with the Miss Milvains, he knew, and could discover, nothing of the terms on which she stood with the girls' brother, and this ignorance was harder to bear than full assurance of a disagreeable fact would have been. That a man like Jasper Milvain, whose name was every now and then forced upon his notice as a rising periodicalist and a faithful henchman of the unspeakable Fadge—that a young fellow of such excellent prospects should seriously attach himself to a girl like Marian seemed to him highly improbable, save, indeed, for the one consideration, that Milvain, who assuredly had a very keen eye to chances, might regard the girl as a niece of old John Yule, and therefore worth holding in view until it was decided whether or not she would benefit by her uncle's decease. Fixed in his antipathy to the young man, he would not allow himself to admit any but a base motive on Milvain's side, if, indeed, Marian and Jasper were more to each other

than slight acquaintances; and he persuaded himself that anxiety for the girl's welfare was at least as strong a motive with him as mere prejudice against the ally of Fadge, and, it might be, the reviewer of 'English Prose.' Milvain was quite capable of playing fast and loose with a girl, and Marian, owing to the peculiar circumstances of her position, would easily be misled by the pretence of a clever speculator.

That she had never spoken again about the review in *The Current* might receive several explanations. Perhaps she had not been able to convince herself either for or against Milvain's authorship; perhaps she had reason to suspect that the young man *was* the author; perhaps she merely shrank from reviving a discussion in which she might betray what she desired to keep secret. This last was the truth. Finding that her father did not recur to the subject, Marian concluded that he had found himself to be misinformed. But Yule, though he heard the original rumour denied by people whom in other matters he would have trusted, would not lay aside the doubt that flattered his prejudices. If Milvain were not the writer of the review, he very well might have been; and

what certainty could be arrived at in matters of literary gossip?

There was an element of jealousy in the father's feeling. If he did not love Marian with all the warmth of which a parent is capable, at least he had more affection for her than for any other person, and of this he became strongly aware now that the girl seemed to be turning from him. If he lost Marian, he would indeed be a lonely man, for he considered his wife of no account. Intellectually again, he demanded an entire allegiance from his daughter; he could not bear to think that her zeal on his behalf was diminishing, that perhaps she was beginning to regard his work as futile and antiquated in comparison with that of the new generation. Yet this must needs be the result of frequent intercourse with such a man as Milvain. It seemed to him that he remarked it in her speech and manner, and at times he with difficulty restrained himself from a reproach or a sarcasm which would have led to trouble.

Had he been in the habit of dealing harshly with Marian, as with her mother, of course his position would have been simpler. But he had always respected her, and he feared to lose that measure of respect with which she repaid him.

Already he had suffered in her esteem, perhaps more than he liked to think, and the increasing embitterment of his temper kept him always in danger of the conflict he dreaded. Marian was not like her mother; she could not submit to tyrannous usage. Warned of that, he did his utmost to avoid an outbreak of discord, constantly hoping that he might come to understand his daughter's position, and perhaps discover that his greatest fear was unfounded.

Twice in the course of the summer he inquired of his wife whether she knew anything about the Milvains. But Mrs. Yule was not in Marian's confidence.

'I only know that she goes to see the young ladies, and that they do writing of some kind.'

'She never even mentions their brother to you?'

'Never. I haven't heard his name from her since she told me the Miss Milvains weren't coming here again.'

He was not sorry that Marian had taken the decision to keep her friends away from St. Paul's Crescent, for it saved him a recurring annoyance; but, on the other hand, if they had continued to come, he would not have been thus completely in the dark as to her intercourse with Jasper:

scraps of information must now and then have been gathered by his wife from the girls' talk.

Throughout the month of July, he suffered much from his wonted bilious attacks, and Mrs. Yule had to endure a double share of his ill-temper, that which was naturally directed against her, and that of which Marian was the cause. In August things were slightly better ; but with the return to labour came a renewal of Yule's sullenness and savageness. Sundry pieces of ill-luck of a professional kind—warnings, as he too well understood, that it was growing more and more difficult for him to hold his own against the new writers—exasperated his quarrel with destiny. The gloom of a cold and stormy September was doubly wretched in that house on the far borders of Camden Town, but in October the sun reappeared and it seemed to mollify the literary man's mood. Just when Mrs. Yule and Marian began to hope that this long distemper must surely come to an end, there befell an incident which, at the best of times, would have occasioned misery, and which in the present juncture proved disastrous.

It was one morning about eleven. Yule was in his study ; Marian was at the Museum ; Mrs. Yule had gone shopping. There came a sharp

knock at the front door, and the servant, on opening, was confronted with a decently-dressed woman, who asked in a peremptory voice if Mrs. Yule was at home.

‘No? Then is Mr. Yule?’

‘Yes, mum, but I’m afraid he’s busy.’

‘I don’t care! I must see him. Say that Mrs. Goby wants to see him at once.’

The servant, not without apprehensions, delivered this message at the door of the study.

‘Mrs. Goby? Who is Mrs. Goby?’ exclaimed the man of letters, irate at the disturbance.

There sounded an answer out of the passage, for the visitor had followed close.

‘I am Mrs. Goby, of the ’Olloway Road, wife of Mr. C. O. Goby, ’aberdasher. I just want to speak to you, Mr. Yule, if you please, seeing that Mrs. Yule isn’t in.’

Yule started up in fury, and stared at the woman, to whom the servant had reluctantly given place.

‘What business can you have with me? If you wish to see Mrs. Yule, come again when she is at home.’

‘No, Mr. Yule, I will *not* come again!’ cried the woman, red in the face. ‘I thought I might have had respectable treatment here, at all

events ; but I see you're pretty much like your relations in the way of behaving to people, though you *do* wear better clothes, and—I s'pose—call yourself a gentleman. I *won't* come again, and you shall just hear what I've got to say.'

She closed the door violently, and stood in an attitude of robust defiance.

'What's all this about ?' asked the enraged author, overcoming an impulse to take Mrs. Goby by the shoulders and throw her out—though he might have found some difficulty in achieving this feat. 'Who are you ? And why do you come here with your brawling ?'

'I'm the respectable wife of a respectable man—that's who I am, Mr. Yule, if you want to know. And I always thought Mrs. Yule was the same, from the dealings we've had with her at the shop, though not knowing any more of her, it's true, except that she lived in St. Paul's Crezzent. And so she may be respectable, though I can't say as her husband behaves himself very much like what he pretends to be. But I can't say as much for her relations in Perker Street, 'Olloway, which I s'pose they're *your* relations as well, at least by marriage. And if they think they're going to insult me, and use their blackguard tongues——'

‘What are you talking about?’ shouted Yule, who was driven to frenzy by the mention of his wife’s humble family. ‘What have I to do with these people?’

‘What have *you* to do with them? I s’pose they’re your relations, ain’t they? And I s’pose the girl Annie Rudd is your niece, ain’t she? At least, she’s your wife’s niece, and that comes to the same thing, I’ve always understood, though I dare say a gentleman as has so many books about him can correct me if I’ve made a mistake.’

She looked scornfully, though also with some surprise, round the volumed walls.

‘And what of this girl? Will you have the goodness to say what your business is?’

‘Yes, I *will* have the goodness! I s’pose you know very well that I took your niece Annie Rudd as a domestic servant’—she repeated this precise definition—‘as a domestic servant, because Mrs. Yule ’appened to arst me if I knew of a place for a girl of that kind, as hadn’t been out before, but could be trusted to do her best to give satisfaction to a good mistress? I s’pose you know that?’

‘I know nothing of the kind. What have I to do with servants?’

‘Well, whether you’ve much to do with them or little, that’s how it was. And nicely she’s paid me out, has your niece, Miss Rudd. Of all the trouble I ever had with a girl! And now when she’s run away back ’ome, and when I take the trouble to go arter her, I’m to be insulted and abused as never was! Oh, they’re a nice respectable family, those Rudds! Mrs. Rudd—that’s Mrs. Yule’s sister—what a nice, polite-spoken lady she is, *to be sure?* If I was to repeat the language—but there, I wouldn’t lower myself. And I’ve been a brute of a mistress; I ill-use my servants, and I don’t give ’em enough to eat, and I pay ’em worse than any woman in London! That’s what I’ve learnt about myself by going to Perker Street, ’Olloway. And when I come here to ask Mrs. Yule what she means by recommending such a creature, from such a ’ome, I get insulted by her gentleman husband.’

Yule was livid with rage, but the extremity of his scorn withheld him from utterance of what he felt.

‘As I said, all this has nothing to do with me. I will let Mrs. Yule know that you have called. I have no more time to spare.’

Mrs. Goby repeated at still greater length

the details of her grievance, but long before she had finished Yule was sitting again at his desk in ostentatious disregard of her. Finally, the exasperated woman flung open the door, railed in a loud voice along the passage, and left the house with an alarming crash.

It was not long before Mrs. Yule returned. Before taking off her things, she went down into the kitchen with certain purchases, and there she learnt from the servant what had happened during her absence. Fear and trembling possessed her—the sick, faint dread always excited by her husband's wrath—but she felt obliged to go at once to the study. The scene that took place there was one of ignoble violence on Yule's part, and, on that of his wife, of terrified self-accusation, changing at length to dolorous resentment of the harshness with which she was treated. When it was over, Yule took his hat and went out.

He did not return for the mid-day meal, and when Marian, late in the afternoon, came back from the Museum, he was still absent.

Not finding her mother in the parlour, Marian called at the head of the kitchen stairs. The servant answered, saying that Mrs. Yule was up in her bedroom, and that she didn't seem

well. Marian at once went up and knocked at the bedroom door. In a moment or two her mother came out, showing a face of tearful misery.

‘What is it, mother? What’s the matter?’

They went into Marian’s room, where Mrs. Yule gave free utterance to her lamentations.

‘I can’t put up with it, Marian! Your father’s too hard with me. I was wrong, I dare say, and I might have known what would have come of it, but he couldn’t speak to me worse if I did him all the harm I could on purpose. It’s all about Annie, because I found a place for her at Mrs. Goby’s, in the ’Olloway Road; and now Mrs. Goby’s been here and seen your father, and told him she’s been insulted by the Rudds, because Annie went off home, and she went after her to make inquiries. And your father’s in such a passion about it as never was. That woman Mrs. Goby rushed into the study when he was working; it was this morning, when I happened to be out. And she throws all the blame on me for recommending her such a girl. And I did it for the best, that I did! Annie promised me faithfully she’d behave well, and never give me trouble, and she seemed thankful to me, because she wasn’t happy at home. And now to think

of her causing all this disturbance ! I oughtn't to have done such a thing without speaking about it to your father ; but you know how afraid I am to say a word to him about those people. And my sister's told me so often I ought to be ashamed of myself, never helping her and her children ; she thinks I could do such a lot if I only liked. And now that I did try to do something, see what comes of it !'

Marian listened with a confusion of wretched feelings. But her sympathies were strongly with her mother ; as well as she could understand the broken story, her father seemed to have no just cause for his pitiless rage, though such an occasion would be likely enough to bring out his worst faults.

'Is he in the study ?' she asked.

'No ; he went out at twelve o'clock, and he's never been back since. I feel as if I must do something ; I can't bear with it, Marian. He tells me I'm the curse of his life--yes, he said that. I oughtn't to tell you, I know I oughtn't ; but it's more than I can bear. I've always tried to do my best, but it gets harder and harder for me. But for me, he'd never be in these bad tempers ; it's because he can't look at me without getting angry. He says I've kept him back

all through his life ; but for me, he might have been far better off than he is. It may be true ; I've often enough thought it. But I can't bear to have it told me like that, and to see it in his face every time he looks at me. I shall have to do something. He'd be glad if only I was out of his way.'

'Father has no right to make you so unhappy,' said Marian. 'I can't see that you did anything blameworthy ; it seems to me that it was your duty to try and help Annie, and if it turned out unfortunately, that can't be helped. You oughtn't to think so much of what father says in his anger ; I believe he hardly knows what he does say. Don't take it so much to heart, mother.'

'I've tried my best, Marian,' sobbed the poor woman, who felt that even her child's sympathy could not be perfect, owing to the distance put between them by Marian's education and refined sensibilities. 'I've always thought it wasn't right to talk to you about such things, but he's been too hard with me to-day.'

'I think it was better you should tell me. It can't go on like this ; I feel that just as you do. I must tell father that he is making our lives a burden to us.'

•

‘Oh, you mustn’t speak to him like that, Marian! I wouldn’t for anything make unkindness between you and your father; that would be the worst thing I’d done yet. I’d rather go away and work for my own living than make trouble between you and him.’

‘It isn’t you who make trouble; it’s father. I ought to have spoken to him before this; I had no right to stand by and see how much you suffered from his ill-temper.’

The longer they talked, the firmer grew Marian’s resolve to front her father’s tyrannous ill-humour, and in one way or another to change the intolerable state of things. She had been weak to hold her peace so long; at her age it was a simple duty to interfere when her mother was treated with such flagrant injustice. Her father’s behaviour was unworthy of a thinking man, and he must be made to feel that.

Yule did not return. Dinner was delayed for half an hour, then Marian declared that they would wait no longer. The two made a sorry meal, and afterwards went together into the sitting-room. At eight o’clock they heard the front door open, and Yule’s footstep in the passage. Marian rose.

‘Don’t speak till to-morrow!’ whispered her

mother, catching at the girl's arm. 'Let it be till to-morrow, Marian!'

'I *must* speak! We can't live in this terror.'

She reached the study just as her father was closing the door behind him. Yule, seeing her enter, glared with blood-shot eyes; shame and sullen anger were blended on his countenance.

'Will you tell me what is wrong, father?' Marian asked, in a voice which betrayed her nervous suffering, yet indicated the resolve with which she had come.

'I am not at all disposed to talk of the matter,' he replied, with the awkward roundness of phrase which distinguished him in his worst humour. 'For information you had better go to Mrs. Goby—or a person of some such name—in Holloway Road. I have nothing more to do with it.'

'It was very unfortunate that the woman came and troubled you about such things. But I can't see that mother was to blame; I don't think you ought to be so angry with her.'

It cost Marian a terrible effort to address her father in these terms. When he turned fiercely upon her, she shrank back and felt as if strength must fail her even to stand.

'You can't see that she was to blame? Isn't

it entirely against my wish that she keeps up any intercourse with those low people? Am I to be exposed to insulting disturbance in my very study, because she chooses to introduce girls of bad character as servants to vulgar women?’

‘I don’t think Annie Rudd can be called a girl of bad character, and it was very natural that mother should try to do something for her. You have never actually forbidden her to see her relatives.’

‘A thousand times I have given her to understand that I utterly disapproved of such association. She knew perfectly well that this girl was as likely as not to discredit her. If she had consulted me, I should at once have forbidden anything of the kind; she was aware of that. She kept it secret from me, knowing that it would excite my displeasure. I will not be drawn into such squalid affairs; I won’t have my name spoken in such connection. Your mother has only herself to blame if I am angry with her.’

‘Your anger goes beyond all bounds. At the very worst, mother behaved imprudently, and with a very good motive. It is cruel that you should make her suffer as she is doing.’

Marian was being strengthened to resist.

Her blood grew hot ; the sensation which once before had brought her to the verge of conflict with her father possessed her heart and brain.

‘You are not a suitable judge of my behaviour,’ replied Yule, severely.

‘I am driven to speak. We can’t go on living in this way, father. For months our home has been almost ceaselessly wretched, because of the ill-temper you are always in. Mother and I must defend ourselves ; we can’t bear it any longer. You must surely feel how ridiculous it is to make such a thing as happened this morning the excuse for violent anger. How can I help judging your behaviour ? When mother is brought to the point of saying that she would rather leave home and everything than endure her misery any longer, I should be wrong if I didn’t speak to you. Why are you so unkind ? What serious cause has mother ever given you ?’

‘I refuse to argue such questions with you.’

‘Then you are very unjust. I am not a child, and there’s nothing wrong in my asking you why home is made a place of misery, instead of being what home ought to be.’

‘You prove that you *are* a child, in asking

for explanations which ought to be clear enough to you.'

'You mean that mother is to blame for everything?'

'The subject is no fit one to be discussed between a father and his daughter. If you cannot see the impropriety of it, be so good as to go away and reflect, and leave me to my occupations.'

Marian came to a pause. But she knew that his rebuke was mere unworthy evasion; she saw that her father could not meet her look, and this perception of shame in him impelled her to finish what she had begun.

'I will say nothing of mother, then, but speak only for myself. I suffer too much from your unkindness; you ask too much endurance.'

'You mean that I exact too much work from you?' asked her father, with a look which might have been directed to a recalcitrant clerk.

'No. But that you make the conditions of my work too hard. I live in constant fear of your anger.'

'Indeed? When did I last ill-use you, or threaten you?'

‘I often think that threats, or even ill-usage, would be easier to bear than an unchanging gloom which always seems on the point of breaking into violence.’

‘I am obliged to you for your criticism of my disposition and manner, but unhappily I am too old to reform. Life has made me what I am, and I should have thought that your knowledge of what my life has been would have gone far to excuse a lack of cheerfulness in me.’

The irony of this laborious period was full of self-pity. His voice quavered at the close, and a tremor was noticeable in his stiff frame.

‘It isn’t lack of cheerfulness that I mean, father. That could never have brought me to speak like this.’

‘If you wish me to admit that I am bad-tempered, surly, irritable—I make no difficulty about that. The charge is true enough. I can only ask you again: What are the circumstances that have ruined my temper? When you present yourself here with a general accusation of my behaviour, I am at a loss to understand what you ask of me, what you wish me to say or do. I must beg you to speak plainly. Are you suggesting that I should make provi-

sion for the support of you and your mother away from my intolerable proximity? My income is not large, as I think you are aware, but of course if a demand of this kind is seriously made, I must do my best to comply with it.'

'It hurts me very much that you can understand me no better than this.'

'I am sorry. I think we used to understand each other, but that was before you were subjected to the influence of strangers.'

In his perverse frame of mind he was ready to give utterance to any thought which confused the point at issue. This last allusion was suggested to him by a sudden pang of regret for the pain he was causing Marian; he defended himself against self-reproach by hinting at the true reason of much of his harshness.

'I am subjected to no influence that is hostile to you,' Marian replied.

'You may think that. But in such a matter it is very easy for you to deceive yourself.'

'Of course I know what you refer to, and I can assure you that I don't deceive myself.'

Yule flashed a searching glance at her.

'Can you deny that you are on terms of

friendship with a—a person who would at any moment rejoice to injure me?’

‘I am friendly with no such person. Will you say whom you are thinking of?’

‘It would be useless. I have no wish to discuss a subject on which we should only disagree unprofitably.’

Marian kept silence for a moment, then said in a low, unsteady voice :

‘It is perhaps because we never speak of that subject that we are so far from understanding each other. If you think that Mr. Milvain is your enemy, that he would rejoice to injure you, you are grievously mistaken.’

‘When I see a man in close alliance with my worst enemy, and looking to that enemy for favour, I am justified in thinking that he would injure me if the right kind of opportunity offered. One need not be very deeply read in human nature to have assurance of that.’

‘But I know Mr. Milvain!’

‘You know him?’

‘Far better than you can, I am sure. You draw conclusions from general principles; but I know that they don’t apply in this case.’

‘I have no doubt you sincerely think so.

I repeat, that nothing can be gained by such a discussion as this.'

'One thing I must tell you. There was no truth in your suspicion that Mr. Milvain wrote that review in *The Current*. He assured me himself that he was not the writer, that he had nothing to do with it.'

Yule looked askance at her, and his face displayed solicitude, which soon passed, however, into a smile of sarcasm.

'The gentleman's word no doubt has weight with you.'

'Father, what do you mean?' broke from Marian, whose eyes of a sudden flashed stormily. 'Would Mr. Milvain tell me a lie?'

'I shouldn't like to say that it is impossible,' replied her father in the same tone as before.

'But—what right have you to insult him so grossly?'

'I have every right, my dear child, to express an opinion about him or any other man, provided I do it honestly. I beg you not to strike attitudes and address me in the language of the stage. You insist on my speaking plainly, and I have spoken plainly. I warned you that we were not like y to agree on this topic.'

'Literary quarrels have made you incapable

of judging honestly in things such as this. I wish I could have done for ever with the hateful profession that so poisons men's minds !'

'Believe me, my girl,' said her father, incisively, 'the simpler thing would be to hold aloof from such people as use the profession in a spirit of unalloyed selfishness, who seek only material advancement, and who, *whatever* connection they form, have nothing but self-interest in view.'

And he glared at her with much meaning. Marian—both had remained standing all through the dialogue—cast down her eyes and became lost in brooding.

'I speak with profound conviction,' pursued her father, 'and, however little you credit me with such a motive, out of desire to guard you against the dangers to which your inexperience is exposed. It is perhaps as well that you have afforded me this——'

There sounded at the house-door that duplicated double-knock which generally announces the bearer of a telegram. Yule interrupted himself, and stood in an attitude of waiting. The servant was heard to go along the passage, to open the door, and then return towards the study. Yes, it was a telegram. Such despatches

rarely came to this house ; Yule tore the envelope, read its contents, and stood with gaze fixed upon the slip of paper until the servant inquired if there was any reply for the boy to take with him.

‘No reply.’

He slowly crumpled the envelope, and stepped aside to throw it into the paper-basket. The telegram he laid on his desk. Marian stood all the time with bent head ; he now looked at her with an expression of meditative displeasure.

‘I don’t know that there’s much good in resuming our conversation,’ he said, in quite a changed tone, as if something of more importance had taken possession of his thoughts and had made him almost indifferent to the past dispute. ‘But of course I am quite willing to hear anything you would still like to say.’

Marian had lost her vehemence. She was absent and melancholy.

‘I can only ask you,’ she replied, ‘to try and make life less of a burden to us.’

‘I shall have to leave town to-morrow for a few days ; no doubt it will be some satisfaction to you to hear that.’

Marian’s eyes turned involuntarily towards the telegram.

‘As for your occupation in my absence,’ he went on, in a hard tone which yet had something tremulous, emotional, making it quite different from the voice he had hitherto used, ‘that will be entirely a matter for your own judgment. I have felt for some time that you assisted me with less good-will than formerly, and now that you have frankly admitted it, I shall of course have very little satisfaction in requesting your aid. I must leave it to you; consult your own inclination.’

It was resentful, but not savage; between the beginning and the end of his speech he softened to a sort of self-satisfied pathos.

‘I can’t pretend,’ replied Marian, ‘that I have as much pleasure in the work as I should have if your mood were gentler.’

‘I am sorry. I might perhaps have made greater efforts to appear at ease when I was suffering.’

‘Do you mean physical suffering?’

‘Physical and mental. But that can’t concern you. During my absence I will think of your reproof. I know that it is deserved, in some degree. If it is possible, you shall have less to complain of in future.’

He looked about the room, and at length

seated himself; his eyes were fixed in a direction away from Marian.

‘I suppose you had dinner somewhere?’ Marian asked, after catching a glimpse of his worn, colourless face.

‘Oh, I had a mouthful of something. It doesn’t matter.’

It seemed as if he found some special pleasure in assuming this tone of martyrdom just now. At the same time he was becoming more absorbed in thought.

‘Shall I have something brought up for you, father?’

‘Something——? Oh no, no; on no account.’

He rose again impatiently, then approached his desk, and laid a hand on the telegram. Marian observed this movement, and examined his face; it was set in an expression of eagerness.

‘You have nothing more to say then?’ He turned sharply upon her.

‘I feel that I haven’t made you understand me, but I can say nothing more.’

‘I understand you very well, too well. That you should misunderstand and mistrust me, I suppose, is natural. You are young and I am old. You are still full of hope, and I have been so often deceived and defeated that I *dare* not

let a ray of hope enter my mind. Judge me ; judge me as hardly as you like. My life has been one long bitter struggle, and if now—— I say,' he began a new sentence, 'that only the hard side of life has been shown to me ; small wonder if I have become hard myself. Desert me ; go your own way, as the young always do. But bear in mind my warning. Remember the caution I have given you.'

He spoke in a strangely sudden agitation. The arm with which he leaned upon the table trembled violently. After a moment's pause he added, in a thick voice :

'Leave me. I will speak to you again in the morning.'

Impressed in a way she did not understand Marian at once obeyed, and rejoined her mother in the parlour. Mrs. Yule gazed anxiously at her as she entered.

'Don't be afraid,' said Marian, with difficulty bringing herself to speak. 'I think it will be better.'

'Was that a telegram that came?' her mother inquired after a silence.

'Yes. I don't know where it was from. But father said he would have to leave town for a few days.'

They exchanged looks.

‘Perhaps your uncle is very ill,’ said the mother in a low voice.

‘Perhaps so.’

The evening passed drearily. Fatigued with her emotions, Marian went early to bed; she even slept later than usual in the morning, and on descending she found her father already at the breakfast table. No greeting passed, and there was no conversation during the meal. Marian noticed that her mother kept glancing at her in a peculiarly grave way; but she felt ill and dejected, and could fix her thoughts on no subject. As he left the table Yule said to her:

‘I want to speak to you for a moment. I shall be in the study.’

She joined him there very soon. He looked coldly at her, and said in a distant tone:

‘The telegram last night was to tell me that your uncle is dead.’

‘Dead!’

‘He died of apoplexy, at a meeting in Watteborough. I shall go down this morning, and of course remain till after the funeral. I see no necessity for your going, unless, of course, it is your desire to do so.’

‘No; I should do as you wish.’

‘I think you had better not go to the Museum whilst I am away. You will occupy yourself as you think fit.’

‘I shall go on with the Harrington notes.’

‘As you please. I don’t know what mourning it would be decent for you to wear; you must consult with your mother about that. That is all I wished to say.’

His tone was dismissal. Marian had a struggle with herself, but she could find nothing to reply to his cold phrases. And an hour or two afterwards Yule left the house without leave-taking.

Soon after his departure there was a visitor’s rat-tat at the door; it heralded Mrs. Goby. In the interview which then took place Marian assisted her mother to bear the vigorous onslaughts of the haberdasher’s wife. For more than two hours Mrs. Goby related her grievances, against the fugitive servant, against Mrs. Yule, against Mr. Yule; meeting with no irritating opposition, she was able in this space of time to cool down to the temperature of normal intercourse, and when she went forth from the house again it was in a mood of dignified displeasure which she felt to be some recompense for the injuries of yesterday.

A result of this annoyance was to postpone conversation between mother and daughter on the subject of John Yule's death until a late hour of the afternoon. Marian was at work in the study, or endeavouring to work, for her thoughts would not fix themselves on the matter in hand for many minutes together, and Mrs. Yule came in with more than her customary diffidence.

‘Have you nearly done for to-day, dear?’

‘Enough for the present, I think.’

She laid down her pen, and leant back in the chair.

‘Marian, do you think your father will be rich?’

‘I have no idea, mother. I suppose we shall know very soon.’

Her tone was dreamy. She seemed to herself to be speaking of something which scarcely at all concerned her, of vague possibilities which did not affect her habits of thought.

‘If that happens,’ continued Mrs. Yule, in a low tone of distress, ‘I don't know what I shall do.’

Marian looked at her questioningly.

‘I can't wish that it mayn't happen,’ her mother went on; ‘I can't, for his sake and for

yours ; but I don't know what I shall do. He'd think me more in his way than ever. He'd wish to have a large house, and live in quite a different way ; and how could I manage then ? I couldn't show myself ; he'd be too much ashamed of me. I shouldn't be in my place ; even you'd feel ashamed of me.'

'You mustn't say that, mother. I have never given you cause to think that.'

'No, my dear, you haven't ; but it would be only natural. I couldn't live the kind of life that you're fit for. I shall be nothing but a hindrance and a shame to both of you.'

'To me you would never be either hindrance or shame ; be quite sure of that. And as for father, I am all but certain that, if he became rich, he would be a very much kinder man, a better man in every way. It is poverty that has made him worse than he naturally is ; it has that effect on almost everybody. Money does harm, too, sometimes ; but never, I think, to people who have a good heart and a strong mind. Father is naturally a warm-hearted man ; riches would bring out all the best in him. He would be generous again, which he has almost forgotten how to be among all his disappoint-

ments and battlings. Don't be afraid of that change, but hope for it.'

Mrs. Yule gave a troublous sigh, and for a few minutes pondered anxiously.

'I wasn't thinking so much about myself,' she said at length. 'It's the hindrance I should be to father. Just because of me, he mightn't be able to use his money as he'd wish. He'd always be feeling that if it wasn't for me things would be so much better for him and for you as well.'

'You must remember,' Marian replied, 'that at father's age people don't care to make such great changes. His home life, I feel sure, wouldn't be so very different from what it is now; he would prefer to use his money in starting a paper or magazine. I know that would be his first thought. If more acquaintances came to his house, what would that matter? It isn't as if he wished for fashionable society. They would be literary people, and why ever shouldn't you meet with them?'

'I've always been the reason why he couldn't have many friends.'

'That's a great mistake. If father ever said that, in his bad temper, he knew it wasn't the truth. The chief reason has always been his

poverty. It costs money to entertain friends; time as well. Don't think in this anxious way, mother. If we are to be rich, it will be better for all of us.'

Marian had every reason for seeking to persuade herself that this was true. In her own heart there was a fear of how wealth might affect her father, but she could not bring herself to face the darker prospect. For her so much depended on that hope of a revival of generous feeling under sunny influences.

It was only after this conversation that she began to reflect on all the possible consequences of her uncle's death. As yet she had been too much disturbed to grasp as a reality the event to which she had often looked forward, though as to something still remote and of quite uncertain results. Perhaps at this moment, though she could not know it, the course of her life had undergone the most important change. Perhaps there was no more need for her to labour upon this 'article' she was manufacturing.

She did not think it probable that she herself would benefit directly by John Yule's will. There was no certainty that even her father would, for he and his brother had never been on cordial terms. But on the whole it seemed

likely that he would inherit money enough to free him from the toil of writing for periodicals. He himself anticipated that. What else could be the meaning of those words in which (and it was before the arrival of the news) he had warned her against 'people who made connections only with self-interest in view'? This threw a sudden light upon her father's attitude towards Jasper Milvain. Evidently he thought that Jasper regarded her as a possible heiress, sooner or later. That suspicion was rankling in his mind; doubtless it intensified the prejudice which originated in literary animosity.

Was there any truth in his suspicion? She did not shrink from admitting that there might be. Jasper had from the first been so frank with her, had so often repeated that money was at present his chief need. If her father inherited substantial property, would it induce Jasper to declare himself more than her friend? She could view the possibility of that, and yet not for a moment be shaken in her love. It was plain that Jasper could not think of marrying until his position and prospects were greatly improved; practically, his sisters depended upon him. What folly it would be to draw back if circumstances led him to avow what hitherto he

had so slightly disguised! She had the conviction that he valued her for her own sake; if the obstacle between them could only be removed, what matter how?

Would he be willing to abandon Clement Fadge, and come over to her father's side? If Yule were able to found a magazine?

Had she read or heard of a girl who went so far in concessions, Marian would have turned away, her delicacy offended. In her own case she could indulge to the utmost that practicality which colours a woman's thought even in mid-passion. The cold exhibition of ignoble scheming will repel many a woman who, for her own heart's desire, is capable of that same compromise with her strict sense of honour.

Marian wrote to Dora Milvain, telling her what had happened. But she refrained from visiting her friends.

Each night found her more restless, each morning less able to employ herself. She shut herself in the study merely to be alone with her thoughts, to be able to walk backwards and forwards, or sit for hours in feverish reverie. From her father came no news. Her mother was suffering dreadfully from suspense, and

often had eyes red with weeping. Absorbed in her own hopes and fears, whilst every hour harassed her more intolerably, Marian was unable to play the part of an encourager; she had never known such exclusiveness of self-occupation.

Yule's return was unannounced. Early in the afternoon, when he had been absent five days, he entered the house, deposited his travelling-bag in the passage, and went upstairs. Marian had come out of the study just in time to see him up on the first landing; at the same moment Mrs. Yule ascended from the kitchen.

‘Wasn't that father?’

‘Yes, he has gone up.’

‘Did he say anything?’

Marian shook her head. They looked at the travelling-bag, then went into the parlour and waited in silence for more than a quarter of an hour. Yule's foot was heard on the stairs; he came down slowly, paused in the passage, entered the parlour with his usual grave, cold countenance.

CHAPTER XXII

THE LEGATEES

EACH day Jasper came to inquire of his sisters if they had news from Wattleborough or from Marian Yule. He exhibited no impatience, spoke of the matter in a disinterested tone; still, he came daily.

One afternoon he found Dora working alone. Maud, he was told, had gone to lunch at Mrs. Lane's.

‘So soon again? She's getting very thick with those people. And why don't they ask you?’

‘Maud has told them that I don't care to go out.’

‘It's all very well, but she mustn't neglect her work. Did she write anything last night or this morning?’

Dora bit the end of her pen, and shook her head.

‘Why not?’

‘The invitation came about five o’clock, and it seemed to unsettle her.’

‘Precisely. That’s what I’m afraid of. She isn’t the kind of girl to stick at work if people begin to send her invitations. But I tell you what it is, you must talk seriously to her ; she has to get her living, you know. Mrs. Lane and her set are not likely to be much use, that’s the worst of it ; they’ll merely waste her time, and make her discontented.’

His sister executed an elaborate bit of cross-hatching on some waste paper. Her lips were drawn together, and her brows wrinkled. At length she broke the silence by saying :

‘Marian hasn’t been yet.’

Jasper seemed to pay no attention ; she looked up at him, and saw that he was in thought.

‘Did you go to those people last night?’ she inquired.

‘Yes. By-the-by, Miss Rupert was there.’

He spoke as if the name would be familiar to his hearer, but Dora seemed at a loss.

‘Who is Miss Rupert?’

‘Didn’t I tell you about her? I thought I did. Oh, I met her first of all at Barlow’s, just after we got back from the seaside. Rather an interesting girl. She’s a daughter of Manton

Rupert, the advertising agent. I want to get invited to their house ; useful people, you know.'

'But is an advertising agent a gentleman?'

Jasper laughed.

'Do you think of him as a bill-poster? At all events he is enormously wealthy, and has a magnificent house at Chislehurst. The girl goes about with her step-mother. I call her a girl, but she must be nearly thirty, and Mrs. Rupert looks only two or three years older. I had quite a long talk with her—Miss Rupert, I mean—last night. She told me she was going to stay next week with the Barlows, so I shall have a run out to Wimbledon one afternoon.'

Dora looked at him inquiringly.

'Just to see Miss Rupert?' she asked, meeting his eyes.

'To be sure. Why not?'

'Oh!' ejaculated his sister, as if the question did not concern her.

'She isn't exactly good-looking,' pursued Jasper, meditatively, with a quick glance at the listener, 'but fairly intellectual. Plays very well, and has a nice contralto voice; she sang that new thing of Tosti's—what do you call it? I thought her rather masculine when I first saw her, but the impression wears off when one

knows her better. She rather takes to me, I fancy.'

'But——' began Dora, after a minute's silence.

'But what?' inquired her brother with an air of interest.

'I don't quite understand you.'

'In general, or with reference to some particular?'

'What right have you to go to places just to see this Miss Rupert?'

'What *right*?' He laughed. 'I am a young man with my way to make. I can't afford to lose any opportunity. If Miss Rupert is so good as to take an interest in me, I have no objection. She's old enough to make friends for herself.'

'Oh, then you consider her simply a friend?'

'I shall see how things go on.'

'But, pray, do you consider yourself perfectly free?' asked Dora, with some indignation.

'Why shouldn't I?'

'Then I think you have been behaving very strangely.'

Jasper saw that she was in earnest. He stroked the back of his head and smiled at the wall.

'With regard to Marian, you mean?'

‘Of course I do.’

‘But Marian understands me perfectly. I have never for a moment tried to make her think that—well, to put it plainly, that I was in love with her. In all our conversations it has been my one object to afford her insight into my character, and to explain my position. She has no excuse whatever for misinterpreting me. And I feel assured that she has done nothing of the kind.’

‘Very well, if you feel satisfied with yourself——’

‘But come now, Dora; what’s all this about? You are Marian’s friend, and, of course, I don’t wish you to say a word about *her*. But let me explain myself. I have occasionally walked part of the way home with Marian, when she and I have happened to go from here at the same time; now there was nothing whatever in our talk at such times that anyone mightn’t have listened to. We are both intellectual people, and we talk in an intellectual way. You seem to have rather old-fashioned ideas—provincial ideas. A girl like Marian Yule claims the new privileges of woman; she would resent it if you supposed that she couldn’t be friendly with a man without attributing “intentions” to him—

to use the old word. We don't live in Wattleborough, where liberty is rendered impossible by the cackling of gossips.'

'No, but——'

'Well?'

'It seems to me rather strange, that's all. We had better not talk about it any more.'

'But I have only just begun to talk about it; I must try to make my position intelligible to you. Now, suppose—a quite impossible thing—that Marian inherited some twenty or thirty thousand pounds; I should forthwith ask her to be my wife.'

'Oh indeed!'

'I see no reason for sarcasm. It would be a most rational proceeding. I like her very much; but to marry her (supposing she would have me) without money would be a gross absurdity, simply spoiling my career, and leading to all sorts of discontents.'

'No one would suggest that you should marry as things are.'

'No; but please to bear in mind that to obtain money somehow or other—and I see no other way than by marriage—is necessary to me, and that with as little delay as possible. I am not at all likely to get a big editorship for

some years to come, and I don't feel disposed to make myself prematurely old by toiling for a few hundreds per annum in the meantime. Now all this I have frankly and fully explained to Marian. I dare say she suspects what I should do if she came into possession of money ; there's no harm in that. But she knows perfectly well that, as things are, we remain intellectual friends.'

'Then listen to me, Jasper. If we hear that Marian gets nothing from her uncle, you had better behave honestly, and let her see that you haven't as much interest in her as before.'

'That would be brutality.'

'It would be honest.'

'Well, no, it wouldn't. Strictly speaking, my interest in Marian wouldn't suffer at all. I should *know* that we could be nothing but friends, that's all. Hitherto I haven't known what might come to pass ; I don't know yet. So far from following your advice, I shall let Marian understand that, if anything, I am more her friend than ever, seeing that henceforth there can be no ambiguities.'

'I can only tell you that Maud would agree with me in what I have been saying.'

‘Then both of you have distorted views.’

‘I think not. It’s you who are unprincipled.’

‘My dear girl, haven’t I been showing you that no man could be more above-board, more straightforward?’

‘You have been talking nonsense, Jasper.’

‘Nonsense? Oh, this female lack of logic! Then my argument has been utterly thrown away. Now that’s one of the things I like in Miss Rupert; she can follow an argument and see consequences. And for that matter so can Marian. I only wish it were possible to refer this question to her.’

There was a tap at the door. Dora called ‘Come in!’ and Marian herself appeared.

‘What an odd thing!’ exclaimed Jasper, lowering his voice. ‘I was that moment saying I wished it were possible to refer a question to you.’

Dora reddened, and stood in an embarrassed attitude.

‘It was the old dispute whether women in general are capable of logic. But pardon me, Miss Yule; I forget that you have been occupied with sad things since I last saw you.’

Dora led her to a chair, asking if her father had returned.

‘Yes, he came back yesterday.’

Jasper and his sister could not think it likely that Marian had suffered much from grief at her uncle’s death ; practically John Yule was a stranger to her. Yet her face bore the signs of acute mental trouble, and it seemed as if some agitation made it difficult for her to speak. The awkward silence that fell upon the three was broken by Jasper, who expressed a regret that he was obliged to take his leave.

‘Maud is becoming a young lady of society,’ he said—just for the sake of saying something—as he moved towards the door. ‘If she comes back whilst you are here, Miss Yule, warn her that that is the path of destruction for literary people.’

‘You should bear that in mind yourself,’ remarked Dora, with a significant look.

‘Oh, I am cool-headed enough to make society serve my own ends.’

Marian turned her head with a sudden movement which was checked before she had quite looked round to him. The phrase he uttered last appeared to have affected her in some way ; her eyes fell, and an expression of pain was on her brows for a moment.

‘I can only stay a few minutes,’ she said,

bending with a faint smile towards Dora, as soon as they were alone. 'I have come on my way from the Museum.'

'Where you have tired yourself to death as usual, I can see.'

'No; I have done scarcely anything. I only pretended to read; my mind is too much troubled. Have you heard anything about my uncle's will?'

'Nothing whatever.'

'I thought it might have been spoken of in Wattleborough, and some friend might have written to you. But I suppose there has hardly been time for that. I shall surprise you very much. Father receives nothing, but I have a legacy of five thousand pounds.'

Dora kept her eyes down.

'Then—what do you think?' continued Marian. 'My cousin Amy has ten thousand pounds.'

'Good gracious! What a difference *that* will make!'

'Yes, indeed. And her brother John has six thousand. But nothing to their mother. There are a good many other legacies, but most of the property goes to the Wattleborough Park—"Yule Park" it will be called—and to

the Volunteers, and things of that kind. They say he wasn't as rich as people thought.'

'Do you know what Miss Harrow gets?'

'She has the house for her life, and fifteen hundred pounds.'

'And your father nothing whatever?'

'Nothing. Not a penny. Oh, I am so grieved! I think it so unkind, so wrong. Amy and her brother to have sixteen thousand pounds and father nothing! I can't understand it. There was no unkind feeling between him and father. He knew what a hard life father has had. Doesn't it seem heartless?'

'What does your father say?'

'I think he feels the unkindness more than he does the disappointment; of course he must have expected something. He came into the room where mother and I were, and sat down, and began to tell us about the will just as if he were speaking to strangers about something he had read in the newspaper—that's the only way I can describe it. Then he got up and went away into the study. I waited a little, then went to him there; he was sitting at work, as if he hadn't been away from home at all. I tried to tell him how sorry I was, but I couldn't say anything. I began to cry foolishly. He spoke

kindly to me, far more kindly than he has done for a long time ; but he wouldn't talk about the will, and I had to go away and leave him. Poor mother, for all she was afraid that we were going to be rich, is broken-hearted at his disappointment.'

'Your mother was afraid?' said Dora.

'Because she thought herself unfitted for life in a large house, and feared we should think her in our way.' She smiled sadly. 'Poor mother! she is so humble and so good. I do hope that father will be kinder to her. But there's no telling yet what the result of this may be. I feel guilty when I stand before him.'

'But he must feel glad that you have five thousand pounds.'

Marian delayed her reply for a moment, her eyes down.

'Yes, perhaps he is glad of that.'

'Perhaps!'

'He can't help thinking, Dora, what use he could have made of it. It has always been his greatest wish to have a literary paper of his own—like *The Study*, you know. He would have used the money in that way, I am sure.'

'But, all the same, he ought to feel pleasure in your good fortune.'

Marian turned to another subject.

‘Think of the Reardons; what a change all at once! What will they do, I wonder? Surely they won’t continue to live apart?’

‘We shall hear from Jasper.’

Whilst they were discussing the affairs of that branch of the family Maud returned. There was ill-humour on her handsome face, and she greeted Marian but coldly. Throwing off her hat and gloves and mantle she listened to the repeated story of John Yule’s bequests.

‘But why ever has Mrs. Reardon so much more than anyone else?’ she asked.

‘We can only suppose it is because she was the favourite child of the brother he liked best. Yet at her wedding he gave her nothing, and spoke contemptuously of her for marrying a literary man.’

‘Fortunate for her poor husband that her uncle was able to forgive her. I wonder what’s the date of the will? Who knows but he may have rewarded her for quarrelling with Mr. Reardon.’

This excited a laugh.

‘I don’t know when the will was made,’ said Marian. ‘And I don’t know whether uncle had even heard of the Reardons’ misfortunes. I

suppose he must have done. My cousin John was at the funeral, but not my aunt. I think it most likely father and John didn't speak a word to each other. Fortunately the relatives were lost sight of in the great crowd of Wattleborough people; there was an enormous procession, of course.'

Maud kept glancing at her sister. The ill-humour had not altogether passed from her face, but it was now blended with reflectiveness.

A few moments more, and Marian had to hasten home. When she was gone the sisters looked at each other.

'Five thousand pounds,' murmured the elder. 'I suppose that is considered nothing.'

'I suppose so.—He was here when Marian came, but didn't stay.'

'Then you'll take him the news this evening?'

'Yes,' replied Dora. 'Then, after musing, 'He seemed annoyed that you were at the Lanes' again.'

Maud made a movement of indifference.

'What has been putting you out?'

'Things were rather stupid. Some people who were to have come didn't turn up. And—well, it doesn't matter.'

She rose and glanced at herself in the little oblong mirror over the mantelpiece.

‘Did Jasper ever speak to you of a Miss Rupert?’ asked Dora.

‘Not that I remember.’

‘What do you think? He told me in the calmest way that he didn’t see why Marian should think of him as anything but the most ordinary friend—said he had never given her reason to think anything else.’

‘Indeed! And Miss Rupert is someone who has the honour of his preference?’

‘He says she is about thirty, and rather masculine, but a great heiress. Jasper is shameful!’

‘What do you expect? I consider it is your duty to let Marian know *everything* he says. Otherwise you help to deceive her. He has no sense of honour in such things.’

Dora was so impatient to let her brother have the news that she left the house as soon as she had had tea on the chance of finding Jasper at home. She had not gone a dozen yards before she encountered him in person.

‘I was afraid Marian might still be with you,’ he said laughing. ‘I should have asked the landlady. Well?’

‘We can’t stand talking here. You had better come in.’

He was in too much excitement to wait.

‘Just tell me. What has she?’

Dora walked quickly towards the house, looking annoyed.

‘Nothing at all? Then what has her father?’

‘*He* has nothing,’ replied his sister, ‘and *she* has five thousand pounds.’

Jasper walked on with bent head. He said nothing more until he was upstairs in the sitting-room, where Maud greeted him carelessly.

‘Mrs. Reardon anything?’

Dora informed him.

‘What?’ he cried, incredulously. ‘Ten thousand? You don’t say so!’

He burst into uproarious laughter.

‘So Reardon is rescued from the slum and the clerk’s desk! Well, I’m glad; by Jove, I am. I should have liked it better if Marian had had the ten thousand and he the five, but it’s an excellent joke. Perhaps the next thing will be that he’ll refuse to have anything to do with his wife’s money; that would be just like him.’

After amusing himself with this subject for a

few minutes more, he turned to the window and stood there in silence.

‘Are you going to have tea with us?’ Dora inquired.

He did not seem to hear her. On a repetition of the inquiry, he answered absently :

‘Yes, I may as well. Then I can go home and get to work.’

During the remainder of his stay he talked very little, and as Maud also was in an abstracted mood, tea passed almost in silence. On the point of departing he asked :

‘When is Marian likely to come here again?’

‘I haven’t the least idea,’ answered Dora.

He nodded, and went his way.

It was necessary for him to work at a magazine article which he had begun this morning, and on reaching home he spread out his papers in the usual business-like fashion. The subject out of which he was manufacturing ‘copy’ had its difficulties, and was not altogether congenial to him ; this morning he had laboured with unwonted effort to produce about a page of manuscript, and now that he tried to resume the task his thoughts would not centre upon it. Jasper was too young to have thoroughly mastered the art of somnambulistic composition ;

to write, he was still obliged to give exclusive attention to the matter under treatment. Dr. Johnson's saying, that a man may write at any time if he will set himself doggedly to it, was often upon his lips, and had even been of help to him, as no doubt it has to many another man obliged to compose amid distracting circumstances; but the formula had no efficacy this evening. Twice or thrice he rose from his chair, paced the room with a determined brow, and sat down again with vigorous clutch of the pen; still he failed to excogitate a single sentence that would serve his purpose.

‘I must have it out with myself before I can do anything,’ was his thought as he finally abandoned the endeavour. ‘I must make up my mind.’

To this end he settled himself in an easy-chair and began to smoke cigarettes. Some dozen of these aids to reflection only made him so nervous that he could no longer remain alone. He put on his hat and overcoat and went out—to find that it was raining heavily. He returned for an umbrella, and before long was walking aimlessly about the Strand, unable to make up his mind whether to turn into a theatre or not. Instead of doing so, he sought a certain upper

room of a familiar restaurant, where the day's papers were to be seen, and perchance an acquaintance might be met. Only half a dozen men were there, reading and smoking, and all were unknown to him. He drank a glass of lager beer, skimmed the news of the evening, and again went out into the bad weather.

After all it was better to go home. Everything he encountered had an unsettling effect upon him, so that he was further than ever from the decision at which he wished to arrive. In Mornington Road he came upon Whelpdale, who was walking slowly under an umbrella.

‘I’ve just called at your place.’

‘All right; come back if you like.’

‘But perhaps I shall waste your time?’ said Whelpdale, with unusual diffidence.

Reassured, he gladly returned to the house. Milvain acquainted him with the fact of John Yule’s death, and with its result so far as it concerned the Reardons. They talked of how the couple would probably behave under this decisive change of circumstances.

‘Biffen professes to know nothing about Mrs. Reardon,’ said Whelpdale. ‘I suspect he keeps his knowledge to himself, out of regard

for Reardon. It wouldn't surprise me if they live apart for a long time yet.'

'Not very likely. It was only want of money.'

'They're not at all suited to each other. Mrs. Reardon no doubt repents her marriage bitterly, and I doubt whether Reardon cares much for his wife.'

'As there's no way of getting divorced they'll make the best of it. Ten thousand pounds produce about four hundred a year; it's enough to live on.'

'And be miserable on—if they no longer love each other.'

'You're such a sentimental fellow,' cried Jasper. 'I believe you seriously think that love—the sort of frenzy you understand by it—ought to endure throughout married life. How has a man come to your age with such primitive ideas?'

'Well, I don't know. Perhaps you err a little in the opposite direction.'

'I haven't much faith in marrying for love, as you know. What's more, I believe it's the very rarest thing for people to be in love with each other. Reardon and his wife perhaps were an instance; perhaps—I'm not quite sure about

her. As a rule, marriage is the result of a mild preference, encouraged by circumstances, and deliberately heightened into strong sexual feeling. You, of all men, know well enough that the same kind of feeling could be produced for almost any woman who wasn't repulsive.'

'The same kind of feeling ; but there's vast difference of degree.'

'To be sure. I think it's only a matter of degree. When it rises to the point of frenzy people may strictly be said to be in love ; and, as I tell you, I think that comes to pass very rarely indeed. For my own part, I have no experience of it, and think I never shall have.'

'I can't say the same.'

They laughed.

'I dare say you have imagined yourself in love—or really been so for aught I know—a dozen times. How the deuce you can attach any importance to such feeling where marriage is concerned I don't understand.'

'Well, now,' said Whelpdale, 'I have never upheld the theory—at least not since I was sixteen—that a man can be in love only once, or that there is one particular woman if he misses whom he can never be happy. There

may be thousands of women whom I could love with equal sincerity.'

'I object to the word "love" altogether. It has been vulgarised. Let us talk about compatibility. Now, I should say that, no doubt, and speaking scientifically, there *is* one particular woman supremely fitted to each man. I put aside consideration of circumstances; we know that circumstances will disturb any degree of abstract fitness. But in the nature of things there must be one woman whose nature is specially well adapted to harmonise with mine, or with yours. If there were any means of discovering this woman in each case, then I have no doubt it would be worth a man's utmost effort to do so, and any amount of erotic jubilation would be reasonable when the discovery was made. But the thing is impossible, and, what's more, we know what ridiculous fallibility people display when they imagine they have found the best substitute for that indiscoverable. This is what makes me impatient with sentimental talk about marriage. An educated man mustn't play so into the hands of ironic destiny. Let him think he *wants* to marry a woman; but don't let him exaggerate his feelings or idealise their nature.'

‘There’s a good deal in all that,’ admitted Whelpdale, though discontentedly.

‘There’s more than a good deal; there’s the last word on the subject. The days of romantic love are gone by. The scientific spirit has put an end to that kind of self-deception. Romantic love was inextricably blended with all sorts of superstitions—belief in personal immortality, in superior beings, in—all the rest of it. What we think of now is moral and intellectual and physical compatibility; I mean, if we are reasonable people.’

‘And if we are not so unfortunate as to fall in love with an incompatible,’ added Whelpdale, laughing.

‘Well, that is a form of unreason—a blind desire which science could explain in each case. I rejoice that I am not subject to that form of epilepsy.’

‘You positively never were in love?’

‘As you understand it, never. But I have felt a very distinct preference.’

‘Based on what you think compatibility?’

‘Yes. Not strong enough to make me lose sight of prudence and advantage. No, not strong enough for that.’

He seemed to be reassuring himself.

‘Then of course that can’t be called love,’ said Whelpdale.

‘Perhaps not. But, as I told you, a preference of this kind can be heightened into emotion, if one chooses. In the case of which I am thinking it easily might be. And I think it very improbable indeed that I should repent it if anything led me to indulge such an impulse.’

Whelpdale smiled.

‘This is very interesting. I hope it may lead to something.’

‘I don’t think it will. I am far more likely to marry some woman for whom I have no preference, but who can serve me materially.’

‘I confess that amazes me. I know the value of money as well as you do, but I wouldn’t marry a rich woman for whom I had no preference. By Jove, no!’

‘Yes, yes. You are a consistent sentimentalist.’

‘Doomed to perpetual disappointment,’ said the other, looking disconsolately about the room.

‘Courage, my boy! I have every hope that I shall see you marry and repent.’

‘I admit the danger of that. But shall I tell

you something I have observed? Each woman I fall in love with is of a higher type than the one before.'

Jasper roared irreverently, and his companion looked hurt.

'But I am perfectly serious, I assure you. To go back only three or four years. There was the daughter of my landlady in Barham Street; well, a nice girl enough, but limited, decidedly limited. Next came that girl at the stationer's—you remember? She was distinctly an advance, both in mind and person. Then there was Miss Embleton; yes, I think she made again an advance. She had been at Bedford College, you know, and was really a girl of considerable attainments; morally, admirable. Afterwards——'

He paused.

'The maiden from Birmingham, wasn't it?' said Jasper, again exploding.

'Yes, it was. Well, I can't be quite sure. But in many respects that girl was my ideal; she really was.'

'As you once or twice told me at the time.'

'I really believe she would rank above Miss Embleton—at all events from my point of view. And that's everything, you know. It's the effect

a woman produces on one that has to be considered.’

‘The next should be a paragon,’ said Jasper.

‘The next?’

Whelpdale again looked about the room, but added nothing, and fell into a long silence.

When left to himself Jasper walked about a little, then sat down at his writing-table, for he felt easier in mind, and fancied that he might still do a couple of hours’ work before going to bed. He did in fact write half a dozen lines, but with the effort came back his former mood. Very soon the pen dropped, and he was once more in the throes of anxious mental debate.

He sat till after midnight, and when he went to his bedroom it was with a lingering step, which proved him still a prey to indecision.

CHAPTER XXIII

A PROPOSED INVESTMENT

ALFRED YULE'S behaviour under his disappointment seemed to prove that even for him the uses of adversity could be sweet. On the day after his return home he displayed a most unwonted mildness in such remarks as he addressed to his wife, and his bearing towards Marian was gravely gentle. At meals he conversed, or rather monologised, on literary topics, with occasionally one of his grim jokes, pointed for Marian's appreciation. He became aware that the girl had been overtaxing her strength of late, and suggested a few weeks of recreation among new novels. The coldness and gloom which had possessed him when he made a formal announcement of the news appeared to have given way before the sympathy manifested by his wife and daughter; he was now sorrowful, but resigned.

He explained to Marian the exact nature of

her legacy. It was to be paid out of her uncle's share in a wholesale stationery business, with which John Yule had been connected for the last twenty years, but from which he had not long ago withdrawn a large portion of his invested capital. This house was known as 'Turberville & Co.,' a name which Marian now heard for the first time.

'I knew nothing of his association with them,' said her father. 'They tell me that seven or eight thousand pounds will be realised from that source; it seems a pity that the investment was not left to you intact. Whether there will be any delay in withdrawing the money I can't say.'

The executors were two old friends of the deceased, one of them a former partner in his paper-making concern.

On the evening of the second day, about an hour after dinner was over, Mr. Hinks called at the house; as usual, he went into the study. Before long came a second visitor, Mr. Quarmby, who joined Yule and Hinks. The three had all sat together for some time, when Marian, who happened to be coming down stairs, saw her father at the study door.

'Ask your mother to let us have some supper

at a quarter to ten,' he said urbanely. 'And come in, won't you? We are only gossiping.'

It had not often happened that Marian was invited to join parties of this kind.

'Do you wish me to come?' she asked.

'Yes, I should like you to, if you have nothing particular to do.'

Marian informed Mrs. Yule that the visitors would have supper, and then went to the study. Mr. Quarmby was smoking a pipe; Mr. Hinks, who on grounds of economy had long since given up tobacco, sat with his hands in his trouser pockets, and his long, thin legs tucked beneath the chair; both rose and greeted Marian with more than ordinary warmth.

'Will you allow me five or six more puffs?' asked Mr. Quarmby, laying one hand on his ample stomach and elevating his pipe as if it were a glass of beaded liquor. 'I shall then have done.'

'As many more as you like,' Marian replied.

The easiest chair was placed for her, Mr. Hinks hastening to perform this courtesy, and her father apprised her of the topic they were discussing.

'What's *your* view, Marian? Is there any-

thing to be said for the establishment of a literary academy in England?’

Mr. Quarmby beamed benevolently upon her, and Mr. Hinks, his scraggy neck at full length, awaited her reply with a look of the most respectful attention.

‘I really think we have quite enough literary quarrelling as it is,’ the girl replied, casting down her eyes and smiling.

Mr. Quarmby uttered a hollow chuckle, Mr. Hinks laughed thinly and exclaimed, ‘Very good indeed! Very good!’ Yule affected to applaud with impartial smile.

‘It wouldn’t harmonise with the Anglo-Saxon spirit,’ remarked Mr. Hinks, with an air of diffident profundity.

Yule held forth on the subject for a few minutes in laboured phrases. Presently the conversation turned to periodicals, and the three men were unanimous in an opinion that no existing monthly or quarterly could be considered as representing the best literary opinion.

‘We want,’ remarked Mr. Quarmby, ‘we want a monthly review which shall deal exclusively with literature. The *Fortnightly*, the *Contemporary*—they are very well in their way, but then they are mere miscellanies. You will

find one solid literary article amid a confused mass of politics and economics and general clap-trap.'

'Articles on the currency and railway statistics and views of evolution,' said Mr. Hinks, with a look as if something were grating between his teeth.

'The quarterlies?' put in Yule. 'Well, the original idea of the quarterlies was that there are not enough important books published to occupy solid reviewers more than four times a year. That may be true, but then a literary monthly would include much more than professed reviews. Hinks's essays on the historical drama would have come out in it very well; or your "Spanish Poets," Quarmby.'

'I threw out the idea to Jedwood the other day,' said Mr. Quarmby, 'and he seemed to nibble at it.'

'Yes, yes,' came from Yule; 'but Jedwood has so many irons in the fire. I doubt if he has the necessary capital at command just now. No doubt he's the man, if some capitalist would join him.'

'No enormous capital needed,' opined Mr. Quarmby. 'The thing would pay its way almost from the first. It would take a place between

the literary weeklies and the quarterlies. The former are too academic, the latter too massive, for multitudes of people who yet have strong literary tastes. Foreign publications should be liberally dealt with. But, as Hinks says, no meddling with the books that are no books—*biblia abiblia*; nothing about essays on bi-metalism and treatises for or against vaccination.'

Even here, in the freedom of a friend's study, he laughed his Reading-room laugh, folding both hands upon his expansive waistcoat.

'Fiction? I presume a serial of the better kind might be admitted?' said Yule.

'That would be advisable, no doubt. But strictly of the better kind.'

'Oh, strictly of the better kind,' chimed in Mr. Hinks.

They pursued the discussion as if they were an editorial committee planning a review of which the first number was shortly to appear. It occupied them until Mrs. Yule announced at the door that supper was ready.

During the meal Marian found herself the object of unusual attention; her father troubled to inquire if the cut of cold beef he sent her was to her taste, and kept an eye on her progress. Mr. Hinks talked to her in a tone of

respectful sympathy, and Mr. Quarmby was paternally jovial when he addressed her. Mrs. Yule would have kept silence, in her ordinary way, but this evening her husband made several remarks which he had adapted to her intellect, and even showed that a reply would be graciously received.

Mother and daughter remained together when the men withdrew to their tobacco and toddy. Neither made allusion to the wonderful change, but they talked more light-heartedly than for a long time.

On the morrow Yule began by consulting Marian with regard to the disposition of matter in an essay he was writing. What she said he weighed carefully, and seemed to think that she had set his doubts at rest.

‘Poor old Hinks!’ he said presently, with a sigh. ‘Breaking up, isn’t he? He positively totters in his walk. I’m afraid he’s the kind of man to have a paralytic stroke; it wouldn’t astonish me to hear at any moment that he was lying helpless.’

‘What ever would become of him in that case?’

‘Goodness knows! One might ask the same

of so many of us. What would become of me, for instance, if I were incapable of work?’

Marian could make no reply.

‘There’s something I’ll just mention to you,’ he went on in a lowered tone, ‘though I don’t wish you to take it too seriously. I’m beginning to have a little trouble with my eyes.’

She looked at him, startled.

‘With your eyes?’

‘Nothing, I hope; but—well, I think I shall see an oculist. One doesn’t care to face a prospect of failing sight, perhaps of cataract, or something of that kind; still, it’s better to know the facts, I should say.’

‘By all means go to an oculist,’ said Marian, earnestly.

‘Don’t disturb yourself about it. It may be nothing at all. But in any case I must change my glasses.’

He rustled over some slips of manuscript, whilst Marian regarded him anxiously.

‘Now, I appeal to you, Marian,’ he continued: ‘could I possibly save money out of an income that has never exceeded two hundred and fifty pounds, and often—I mean even in latter years—has been much less?’

‘I don’t see how you could.’

‘In one way, of course, I have managed it. My life is insured for five hundred pounds. But that is no provision for possible disablement. If I could no longer earn money with my pen, what would become of me?’

Marian could have made an encouraging reply, but did not venture to utter her thoughts.

‘Sit down,’ said her father. ‘You are not to work for a few days, and I myself shall be none the worse for a morning’s rest. Poor old Hinks! I suppose we shall help him among us, somehow. Quarmby, of course, is comparatively flourishing. Well, we have been companions for a quarter of a century, we three. When I first met Quarmby I was a Grub Street gazetteer, and I think he was even poorer than I. A life of toil! A life of toil!’

‘That it has been, indeed.’

‘By-the-by’—he threw an arm over the back of his chair—‘what did you think of our imaginary review, the thing we were talking about last night?’

‘There are so many periodicals,’ replied Marian, doubtfully.

‘So many? My dear child, if we live another ten years we shall see the number trebled.’

‘Is it desirable?’

‘That there should be such growth of periodicals? Well, from one point of view, no. No doubt they take up the time which some people would give to solid literature. But, on the other hand, there’s a far greater number of people who would probably not read at all, but for the temptations of these short and new articles; and they may be induced to pass on to substantial works. Of course it all depends on the quality of the periodical matter you offer. Now, magazines like’—he named two or three of popular stamp—‘might very well be dispensed with, unless one regards them as an alternative to the talking of scandal or any other vicious result of total idleness. But such a monthly as we projected would be of distinct literary value. There can be no doubt that someone or other will shortly establish it.’

‘I am afraid,’ said Marian, ‘I haven’t so much sympathy with literary undertakings as you would like me to have.’

Money is a great fortifier of self-respect. Since she had become really conscious of her position as the owner of five thousand pounds, Marian spoke with a steadier voice, walked with firmer step; mentally she felt herself altogether a less dependent being. She might have con-

fessed this lukewarmness towards literary enterprise in the anger which her father excited eight or nine days ago, but at that time she could not have uttered her opinion calmly, deliberately, as now. The smile which accompanied the words was also new; it signified deliverance from pupilage.

‘I have felt that,’ returned her father, after a slight pause to command his voice, that it might be suave instead of scornful. ‘I greatly fear that I have made your life something of a martyrdom——’

‘Don’t think I meant that, father. I am speaking only of the general question. I can’t be quite so zealous as you are, that’s all. I love books, but I could wish people were content for a while with those we already have.’

‘My dear Marian, don’t suppose that I am out of sympathy with you here. Alas! how much of my work has been mere drudgery, mere labouring for a livelihood! How gladly I would have spent much more of my time among the great authors, with no thought of making money of them! If I speak approvingly of a scheme for a new periodical, it is greatly because of my necessities.’

He paused and looked at her. Marian returned the look.

‘You would of course write for it,’ she said.

‘Marian, why shouldn’t I edit it? Why shouldn’t it be *your* property?’

‘My property——?’

She checked a laugh. There came into her mind a more disagreeable suspicion than she had ever entertained of her father. Was this the meaning of his softened behaviour? Was he capable of calculated hypocrisy? That did not seem consistent with his character, as she knew it.

‘Let us talk it over,’ said Yule. He was in visible agitation, and his voice shook. ‘The idea may well startle you at first. It will seem to you that I propose to make away with your property before you have even come into possession of it.’ He laughed. ‘But, in fact, what I have in mind is merely an investment for your capital, and that an admirable one. Five thousand pounds at three per cent.—one doesn’t care to reckon on more—represents a hundred and fifty a year. Now, there can be very little doubt that, if it were invested in literary property such as I have in mind, it would bring you five times that interest, and before long perhaps much

more. Of course I am now speaking in the roughest outline. I should have to get trustworthy advice; complete and detailed estimates would be submitted to you. At present I merely suggest to you this form of investment.'

He watched her face eagerly, greedily. When Marian's eyes rose to his he looked away.

'Then, of course,' she said, 'you don't expect me to give any decided answer.'

'Of course not—of course not. I merely put before you the chief advantages of such an investment. As I am a selfish old fellow, I'll talk about the benefit to myself first of all. I should be editor of the new review; I should draw a stipend sufficient to all my needs—quite content, at first, to take far less than another man would ask, and to progress with the advance of the periodical. This position would enable me to have done with mere drudgery; I should only write when I felt called to do so—when the spirit moved me.' Again he laughed, as though desirous of keeping his listener in good humour. 'My eyes would be greatly spared henceforth.'

He dwelt on that point, waiting its effect on Marian. As she said nothing he proceeded:

'And suppose I really were doomed to lose my sight in the course of a few years, am I

wrong in thinking that the proprietor of this periodical would willingly grant a small annuity to the man who had firmly established it?’

‘I see the force of all that,’ said Marian; ‘but it takes for granted that the periodical will be successful.’

‘It does. In the hands of a publisher like Jedwood—a vigorous man of the new school—its success could scarcely be doubtful.’

‘Do you think five thousand pounds would be enough to start such a review?’

‘Well, I can say nothing definite on that point. For one thing, the coat must be made according to the cloth; expenditure can be largely controlled without endangering success. Then again, I think Jedwood would take a share in the venture. These are details. At present I only want to familiarise you with the thought that an investment of this sort will very probably offer itself to you.’

‘It would be better if we called it a speculation,’ said Marian, smiling uneasily.

Her one object at present was to oblige her father to understand that the suggestion by no means lured her. She could not tell him that what he proposed was out of the question, though as yet that was the light in which she saw it.

His subtlety of approach had made her feel justified in dealing with him in a matter-of-fact way. He must see that she was not to be cajoled. Obviously, and in the nature of the case, he was urging a proposal in which he himself had all faith; but Marian knew his judgment was far from infallible. It mitigated her sense of behaving unkindly to reflect that in all likelihood this disposal of her money would be the worst possible for her own interests, and therefore for his. If, indeed, his dark forebodings were warranted, then upon her would fall the care of him, and the steadiness with which she faced that responsibility came from a hope of which she could not speak.

‘Name it as you will,’ returned her father, hardly suppressing a note of irritation. ‘True, every commercial enterprise is a speculation. But let me ask you one question, and beg you to reply frankly. Do you distrust my ability to conduct this periodical?’

She did. She knew that he was not in touch with the interests of the day, and that all manner of considerations akin to the prime end of selling his review would make him an untrustworthy editor. But how could she tell him this?

‘My opinion would be worthless,’ she replied.

‘If Jedwood were disposed to put confidence in me, you also would?’

‘There’s no need to talk of that now, father. Indeed, I can’t say anything that would sound like a promise.’

He flashed a glance at her. Then she was more than doubtful?

‘But you have no objection, Marian, to talk in a friendly way of a project that would mean so much to me?’

‘But I am afraid to encourage you,’ she replied, frankly. ‘It is impossible for me to say whether I can do as you wish, or not.’

‘Yes, yes; I perfectly understand that. Heaven forbid that I should regard you as a child to be led independently of your own views and wishes! With so large a sum of money at stake, it would be monstrous if I acted rashly, and tried to persuade you to do the same. The matter will have to be most gravely considered.’

‘Yes.’ She spoke mechanically.

‘But if only it should come to something! You don’t know what it would mean to me, Marian.’

‘Yes, father; I know very well how you think and feel about it.’

‘Do you?’ He leaned forward, his features working under stress of emotion. ‘If I could see myself the editor of an influential review, all my bygone toils and sufferings would be as nothing; I should rejoice in them as the steps to this triumph. *Meminisse jurabit!* My dear, I am not a man fitted for subordinate places. My nature is framed for authority. The failure of all my undertakings rankles so in my heart that sometimes I feel capable of every brutality, every meanness, every hateful cruelty. To you I have behaved shamefully. Don’t interrupt me, Marian. I have treated you abominably, my child, my dear daughter—and all the time with a full sense of what I was doing. That’s the punishment of faults such as mine. I hate myself for every harsh word and angry look I have given you; at the time, I hated myself!’

‘Father——’

‘No, no; let me speak, Marian. You have forgiven me; I know it. You were always ready to forgive, dear. Can I ever forget that evening when I spoke like a brute, and you came afterwards and addressed me as if the wrong had been on your side? It burns in my memory.

It wasn't I who spoke; it was the demon of failure, of humiliation. My enemies sit in triumph, and scorn at me; the thought of it is infuriating. Have I deserved this? Am I the inferior of—of those men who have succeeded and now try to trample on me? No! I am not! I have a better brain and a better heart!

Listening to this strange outpouring, Marian more than forgave the hypocrisy of the last day or two. Nay, could it be called hypocrisy? It was only his better self declared at the impulse of a passionate hope.

'Why should you think so much of these troubles, father? Is it such a great matter that narrow-minded people triumph over you?'

'Narrow-minded?' He clutched at the word. 'You admit they are that?'

'I feel very sure that Mr. Fadge is.'

'Then you are not on his side against me?'

'How could you suppose such a thing?'

'Well, well; we won't talk of that. Perhaps it isn't a great matter. No—from a philosophical point of view, such things are unspeakably petty. But I am not much of a philosopher.' He laughed, with a break in his voice. 'Defeat in life is defeat, after all; and unmerited failure

is a bitter curse. You see, I am not too old to do something yet. My sight is failing, but I can take care of it. If I had my own review, I would write every now and then a critical paper in my very best style. You remember poor old Hinks's note about me in his book? We laughed at it, but he wasn't so far wrong. I have many of those qualities. A man is conscious of his own merits, as well as of his defects. I have done a few admirable things. You remember my paper on Lord Herbert of Cherbury? No one ever wrote a more subtle piece of criticism; but it was swept aside among the rubbish of the magazines. And it's just because of my pungent phrases that I have excited so much enmity. Wait! Wait! Let me have my own review, and leisure, and satisfaction of mind—heavens! what I will write! How I will scarify!

‘That is unworthy of you. How much better to ignore your enemies! In such a position, I should carefully avoid every word that betrayed personal feeling.’

‘Well, well; you are of course right, my good girl. And I believe I should do injustice to myself if I made you think that those ignoble motives are the strongest in me. No; it isn't so. From my boyhood I have had a passionate desire

of literary fame, deep down below all the surface faults of my character. The best of my life has gone by, and it drives me to despair when I feel that I have not gained the position due to me. There is only one way of doing this now, and that is by becoming the editor of an important periodical. Only in that way shall I succeed in forcing people to pay attention to my claims. Many a man goes to his grave unrecognised, just because he has never had a fair judgment. Nowadays it is the unscrupulous men of business who hold the attention of the public ; they blow their trumpets so loudly that the voices of honest men have no chance of being heard.'

Marian was pained by the humility of his pleading with her—for what was all this but an endeavour to move her sympathies?—and by the necessity she was under of seeming to turn a deaf ear. She believed that there was some truth in his estimate of his own powers ; though as an editor he would almost certainly fail, as a man of letters he had probably done far better work than some who had passed him by on their way to popularity. Circumstances might enable her to assist him, though not in the way he proposed. The worst of it was that she could not

let him see what was in her mind. He must think that she was simply balancing her own satisfaction against his, when in truth she suffered from the conviction that to yield would be as unwise in regard to her father's future as it would be perilous to her own prospect of happiness.

‘Shall we leave this to be talked of when the money has been paid over to me?’ she said, after a silence.

‘Yes. Don't suppose I wish to influence you by dwelling on my own hardships. That would be contemptible. I have only taken this opportunity of making myself better known to you. I don't readily talk of myself, and in general my real feelings are hidden by the faults of my temper. In suggesting how you could do me a great service, and at the same time reap advantage for yourself, I couldn't but remember how little reason you have to think kindly of me. But we will postpone further talk. You will think over what I have said?’

Marian promised that she would, and was glad to bring the conversation to an end.

When Sunday came, Yule inquired of his daughter if she had any engagement for the afternoon.

‘Yes, I have,’ she replied, with an effort to disguise her embarrassment.

‘I’m sorry. I thought of asking you to come with me to Quarmby’s. Shall you be away through the evening?’

‘Till about nine o’clock, I think.’

‘Ah! Never mind, never mind.’

He tried to dismiss the matter as if it were of no moment, but Marian saw the shadow that passed over his countenance. This was just after breakfast. For the remainder of the morning she did not meet him, and at the mid-day dinner he was silent, though he brought no book to the table with him, as he was wont to do when in his dark moods. Marian talked with her mother, doing her best to preserve the appearance of cheerfulness which was natural since the change in Yule’s demeanour.

She chanced to meet her father in the passage just as she was going out. He smiled (it was more like a grin of pain) and nodded, but said nothing.

When the front door closed, he went into the parlour. Mrs. Yule was reading, or, at all events, turning over a volume of an illustrated magazine.

‘Where do you suppose she has gone?’ he

asked, in a voice which was only distant, not offensive.

‘To the Miss Milvains, I believe,’ Mrs. Yule answered, looking aside.

‘Did she tell you so?’

‘No. We don’t talk about it.’

He seated himself on the corner of a chair and bent forward, his chin in his hand.

‘Has she said anything to you about the review?’

‘Not a word.’

She glanced at him timidly, and turned a few pages of her book.

‘I wanted her to come to Quarmby’s, because there’ll be a man there who is anxious that Jedwood should start a magazine, and it would be useful for her to hear practical opinions. There’d be no harm if you just spoke to her about it now and then. Of course if she has made up her mind to refuse me it’s no use troubling myself any more. I should think you might find out what’s really going on.’

Only dire stress of circumstances could have brought Alfred Yule to make distinct appeal for his wife’s help. There was no underhand plotting between them to influence their daughter; Mrs. Yule had as much desire for the happiness

of her husband as for that of Marian, but she felt powerless to effect anything on either side.

‘If ever she says anything, I’ll let you know.’

‘But it seems to me that you have a right to question her.’

‘I can’t do that, Alfred.’

‘Unfortunately, there are a good many things you can’t do.’

With that remark, familiar to his wife in substance, though the tone of it was less caustic than usual, he rose and sauntered from the room. He spent a gloomy hour in the study, then went off to join the literary circle at Mr. Quarmby’s.

CHAPTER XXIV

JASPER'S MAGNANIMITY

OCCASIONALLY Milvain met his sisters as they came out of church on Sunday morning, and walked home to have dinner with them. He did so to-day, though the sky was cheerless and a strong north-west wind made it anything but agreeable to wait about in open spaces.

‘Are you going to Mrs. Wright’s this afternoon?’ he asked, as they went on together.

‘I thought of going,’ replied Maud. ‘Marian will be with Dora.’

‘You ought both to go. You mustn’t neglect that woman.’

He said nothing more just then, but when presently he was alone with Dora in the sitting-room for a few minutes, he turned with a peculiar smile and remarked quietly:

‘I think you had better go with Maud this afternoon.’

‘But I can’t. I expect Marian at three.’

‘That’s just why I want you to go.’

She looked her surprise.

‘I want to have a talk with Marian. We’ll manage it in this way. At a quarter to three you two shall start, and as you go out you can tell the landlady that if Miss Yule comes she is to wait for you, as you won’t be long. She’ll come upstairs, and I shall be there. You see?’

Dora turned half away, disturbed a little, but not displeased.

‘And what about Miss Rupert?’ she asked.

‘Oh, Miss Rupert may go to Jericho for all I care. I’m in a magnanimous mood.’

‘Very, I’ve no doubt.’

‘Well, you’ll do this? One of the results of poverty, you see; one can’t even have a private conversation with a friend without plotting to get the use of a room. But there shall be an end of this state of things.’

He nodded significantly. Thereupon Dora left the room to speak with her sister.

The device was put into execution, and Jasper saw his sisters depart knowing that they were not likely to return for some three hours. He seated himself comfortably by the fire and mused. Five minutes had hardly gone by when

he looked at his watch, thinking Marian must be unpunctual. He was nervous, though he had believed himself secure against such weakness. His presence here with the purpose he had in his mind seemed to him distinctly a concession to impulses he ought to have controlled ; but to this resolve he had come, and it was now too late to recommence the arguments with himself. Too late ? Well, not strictly so ; he had committed himself to nothing ; up to the last moment of freedom he could always——

That was doubtless Marian's knock at the front door. He jumped up, walked the length of the room, sat down on another chair, returned to his former seat. Then the door opened and Marian came in.

She was not surprised ; the landlady had mentioned to her that Mr. Milvain was upstairs, waiting the return of his sisters.

‘I am to make Dora's excuses,’ Jasper said. ‘She begged you would forgive her—that you would wait.’

‘Oh yes.’

‘And you were to be sure to take off your hat,’ he added in a laughing tone ; ‘and to let me put your umbrella in the corner—like that.’

He had always admired the shape of Marian's head, and the beauty of her short, soft, curly hair. As he watched her uncovering it, he was pleased with the grace of her arms and the pliancy of her slight figure.

'Which is usually your chair?'

'I'm sure I don't know.'

'When one goes to see a friend frequently, one gets into regular habits in these matters. In Biffen's garret I used to have the most uncomfortable chair it was ever my lot to sit upon; still, I came to feel an affection for it. At Reardon's I always had what was supposed to be the most luxurious seat, but it was too small for me, and I eyed it resentfully on sitting down and rising.'

'Have you any news about the Reardons?'

'Yes. I am told that Reardon has had the offer of a secretaryship to a boys' home, or something of the kind, at Croydon. But I suppose there'll be no need for him to think of that now.'

'Surely not!'

'Oh, there's no saying.'

'Why should he do work of that kind now?'

'Perhaps his wife will tell him that she wants her money all for herself.'

Marian laughed. It was very rarely that Jasper had heard her laugh at all, and never so spontaneously as this. He liked the music.

‘You haven’t a very good opinion of Mrs. Reardon,’ she said.

‘She is a difficult person to judge. I never disliked her, by any means; but she was decidedly out of place as the wife of a struggling author. Perhaps I have been a little prejudiced against her since Reardon quarrelled with me on her account.’

Marian was astonished at this unlooked-for explanation of the rupture between Milvain and his friend. That they had not seen each other for some months she knew from Jasper himself, but no definite cause had been assigned.

‘I may as well let you know all about it,’ Milvain continued, seeing that he had disconcerted the girl, as he meant to. ‘I met Reardon not long after they had parted, and he charged me with being in great part the cause of his troubles.’

The listener did not raise her eyes.

‘You would never imagine what my fault was. Reardon declared that the tone of my conversation had been morally injurious to his wife. He said I was always glorifying wordly success,

and that this had made her discontented with her lot. Sounds rather ludicrous, don't you think?'

'It was very strange.'

'Reardon was in desperate earnest, poor fellow. And, to tell you the truth, I fear there may have been something in his complaint. I told him at once that I should henceforth keep away from Mrs. Edmund Yule's; and so I have done, with the result, of course, that they suppose I condemn Mrs. Reardon's behaviour. The affair was a nuisance, but I had no choice, I think.'

'You say that perhaps your talk really was harmful to her?'

'It may have been, though such a danger never occurred to me.'

'Then Amy must be very weak-minded.'

'To be influenced by such a paltry fellow?'

'To be influenced by anyone in such a way.'

'You think the worse of me for this story?'

Jasper asked.

'I don't quite understand it. How did you talk to her?'

'As I talk to everyone. You have heard me say the same things many a time. I simply declare my opinion that the end of literary work—

unless one is a man of genius—is to secure comfort and repute. This doesn't seem to me very scandalous. But Mrs. Reardon was perhaps too urgent in repeating such views to her husband. She saw that in my case they were likely to have solid results, and it was a misery to her that Reardon couldn't or wouldn't work in the same practical way.'

'It was very unfortunate.'

'And you are inclined to blame me?'

'No; because I am so sure that you only spoke in the way natural to you, without a thought of such consequences.'

Jasper smiled.

'That's precisely the truth. Nearly all men who have their way to make think as I do, but most feel obliged to adopt a false tone, to talk about literary conscientiousness, and so on. I simply say what I think, with no pretences. I should like to be conscientious, but it's a luxury I can't afford. I've told you all this often enough, you know.'

'Yes.'

'But it hasn't been morally injurious to you,' he said with a laugh.

'Not at all. Still I don't like it.'

Jasper was startled. He gazed at her. Ought

he, then, to have dealt with her less frankly? Had he been mistaken in thinking that the unusual openness of his talk was attractive to her? She spoke with quite unaccustomed decision; indeed, he had noticed from her entrance that there was something unfamiliar in her way of conversing. She was so much more self-possessed than of wont, and did not seem to treat him with the same deference, the same subdual of her own personality.

‘You don’t like it?’ he repeated calmly. ‘It has become rather tiresome to you?’

‘I feel sorry that you should always represent yourself in an unfavourable light.’

He was an acute man, but the self-confidence with which he had entered upon this dialogue, his conviction that he had but to speak when he wished to receive assurance of Marian’s devotion, prevented him from understanding the tone of independence she had suddenly adopted. With more modesty he would have felt more subtly at this juncture, would have divined that the girl had an exquisite pleasure in drawing back now that she saw him approaching her with unmistakable purpose, that she wished to be wooed in less off-hand fashion before confessing what was in her heart. For the moment he was dis-

concerted. Those last words of hers had a slight tone of superiority, the last thing he would have expected upon her lips.

‘Yet I surely haven’t always appeared so—to you?’ he said.

‘No, not always.’

‘But you are in doubt concerning the real man?’

‘I’m not sure that I understand you. You say that you do really think as you speak.’

‘So I do. I think that there is no choice for a man who can’t bear poverty. I have never said, though, that I had pleasure in mean necessities; I accept them because I can’t help it.’

It was a delight to Marian to observe the anxiety with which he turned to self-defence. Never in her life had she felt this joy of holding a position of command. It was nothing to her that Jasper valued her more because of her money; impossible for it to be otherwise. Satisfied that he did value her, to begin with, for her own sake, she was very willing to accept money as her ally in the winning of his love. He scarcely loved her yet, as she understood the feeling, but she perceived her power over him, and passion taught her how to exert it.

‘But you resign yourself very cheerfully to the necessity,’ she said, looking at him with merely intellectual eyes.

‘You had rather I lamented my fate in not being able to devote myself to nobly unremunerative work?’

There was a note of irony here. It caused her a tremor, but she held her position.

‘That you never do so would make one think—but I won’t speak unkindly.’

‘That I neither care for good work nor am capable of it,’ Jasper finished her sentence. ‘I shouldn’t have thought it would make *you* think so.’

Instead of replying she turned her look towards the door. There was a footstep on the stairs, but it passed.

‘I thought it might be Dora,’ she said.

‘She won’t be here for another couple of hours at least,’ replied Jasper with a slight smile.

‘But you said——?’

‘I sent her to Mrs. Boston Wright’s that I might have an opportunity of talking to you. Will you forgive the stratagem?’

Marian resumed her former attitude, the faintest smile hovering about her lips.

‘I’m glad there’s plenty of time,’ he continued. ‘I begin to suspect that you have been misunderstanding me of late. I must set that right.’

‘I don’t think I have misunderstood you.’

‘That may mean something very disagreeable. I know that some people whom I esteem have a very poor opinion of me, but I can’t allow you to be one of them. What do I seem to you? What is the result on your mind of all our conversations?’

‘I have already told you.’

‘Not seriously. Do you believe I am capable of generous feeling?’

‘To say no, would be to put you in the lowest class of men, and that a very small one.’

‘Good! Then I am not among the basest. But that doesn’t give me very distinguished claims upon your consideration. Whatever I am, I aim high in some of my ambitions.’

‘Which of them?’

‘For instance, I have been daring enough to hope that you might love me.’

Marian delayed for a moment, then said quietly :

‘Why do you call that daring?’

‘Because I have enough of old-fashioned thought to believe that a woman who is worthy of a man’s love is higher than he, and condescends in giving herself to him.’

His voice was not convincing; the phrase did not sound natural on his lips. It was not thus that she had hoped to hear him speak. Whilst he expressed himself thus conventionally he did not love her as she desired to be loved.

‘I don’t hold that view,’ she said.

‘It doesn’t surprise me. You are very reserved on all subjects, and we have never spoken of this, but of course I know that your thought is never commonplace. Hold what view you like of woman’s position, that doesn’t affect mine.’

‘Is yours commonplace, then?’

‘Desperately. Love is a very old and common thing, and I believe I love you in the old and common way. I think you beautiful, you seem to me womanly in the best sense, full of charm and sweetness. I know myself a coarse being in comparison. All this has been felt and said in the same way by men infinite in variety. Must I find some new expression before you can believe me?’

Marian kept silence.

'I know what you are thinking,' he said. 'The thought is as inevitable as my consciousness of it.'

For an instant she looked at him.

'Yes, you look the thought. Why have I not spoken to you in this way before? Why have I waited until you are obliged to suspect my sincerity?'

'My thought is not so easily read, then,' said Marian.

'To be sure it hasn't a gross form, but I know you wish—whatever your real feeling towards me—that I had spoken a fortnight ago. You would wish that of any man in my position, merely because it is painful to you to see a possible insincerity. Well, I am not insincere. I have thought of you as of no other woman for some time. But—yes, you shall have the plain, coarse truth, which is good in its way, no doubt. I was afraid to say that I loved you. You don't flinch; so far, so good. Now what harm is there in this confession? In the common course of things I shouldn't be in a position to marry for perhaps three or four years, and even then marriage would mean difficulties, restraints, obstacles. I have always dreaded the thought of

marriage with a poor income. You remember?

Love in a hut, with water and a crust,
Is—Love forgive us!—cinders, ashes, dust.

You know that is true.'

'Not always, I dare say.'

'But for the vast majority of mortals. There's the instance of the Reardons. They were in love with each other, if ever two people were; but poverty ruined everything. I am not in the confidence of either of them, but I feel sure each has wished the other dead. What else was to be expected? Should I have dared to take a wife in my present circumstances—a wife as poor as myself?'

'You will be in a much better position before long,' said Marian. 'If you loved me, why should you have been afraid to ask me to have confidence in your future?'

'It's all so uncertain. It may be another ten years before I can count on an income of five or six hundred pounds—if I have to struggle on in the common way.'

'But tell me, what is your aim in life? What do you understand by success?'

'Yes, I will tell you. My aim is to have easy command of all the pleasures desired by a culti-

vated man. I want to live among beautiful things, and never to be troubled by a thought of vulgar difficulties. I want to travel and enrich my mind in foreign countries. I want to associate on equal terms with refined and interesting people. I want to be known, to be familiarly referred to, to feel when I enter a room that people regard me with some curiosity.'

He looked steadily at her with bright eyes.

'And that's all?' asked Marian.

'That is very much. Perhaps you don't know how I suffer in feeling myself at a disadvantage. My instincts are strongly social, yet I can't be at my ease in society, simply because I can't do justice to myself. Want of money makes me the inferior of the people I talk with, though I might be superior to them in most things. I am ignorant in many ways, and merely because I am poor. Imagine my never having been out of England! It shames me when people talk familiarly of the Continent. So with regard to all manner of amusements and pursuits at home. Impossible for me to appear among my acquaintances at the theatre, at concerts. I am perpetually at a disadvantage; I haven't fair play. Suppose me possessed of money enough

to live a full and active life for the next five years ; why, at the end of that time my position would be secure. To him that hath shall be given—you know how universally true that is.'

'And yet,' came in a low voice from Marian, 'you say that you love me.'

'You mean that I speak as if no such thing as love existed. But you asked me what I understood by success. I am speaking of worldly things. Now suppose I had said to you: My one aim and desire in life is to win your love. Could you have believed me? Such phrases are always untrue; I don't know how it can give anyone pleasure to hear them. But if I say to you: All the satisfactions I have described would be immensely heightened if they were shared with a woman who loved me—there is the simple truth.'

Marian's heart sank. She did not want truth such as this; she would have preferred that he should utter the poor, common falsehoods. Hungry for passionate love, she heard with a sense of desolation all this calm reasoning. That Jasper was of cold temperament she had often feared; yet there was always the consoling thought that she did not see with perfect clear-

ness into his nature. Now and then had come a flash, a hint of possibilities. She had looked forward with trembling eagerness to some sudden revelation; but it seemed as if he knew no word of the language which would have called such joyous response from her expectant soul.

‘We have talked for a long time,’ she said, turning her head as if his last words were of no significance. ‘As Dora is not coming, I think I will go now.’

She rose, and went towards the chair on which lay her out-of-door things. At once Jasper stepped to her side.

‘You will go without giving me any answer?’

‘Answer? To what?’

‘Will you be my wife?’

‘It is too soon to ask me that.’

‘Too soon? Haven’t you known for months that I thought of you with far more than friendliness?’

‘How was it possible I should know that? You have explained to me why you would not let your real feelings be understood.’

The reproach was merited, and not easy to be outfaced. He turned away for an instant, then with a sudden movement caught both her hands.

‘Whatever I have done or said or thought in the past, that is of no account now. I love you, Marian. I want you to be my wife. I have never seen any other girl who impressed me as you did from the first. If I had been weak enough to try to win anyone but you, I should have known that I had turned aside from the path of my true happiness. Let us forget for a moment all our circumstances. I hold your hands, and look into your face, and say that I love you. Whatever answer you give, I love you!’

Till now her heart had only fluttered a little; it was a great part of her distress that the love she had so long nurtured seemed shrinking together into some far corner of her being whilst she listened to the discourses which prefaced Jasper’s declaration. She was nervous, painfully self-conscious, touched with maidenly shame, but could not abandon herself to that delicious emotion which ought to have been the fulfilment of all her secret imaginings. Now at length there began a throbbing in her bosom. Keeping her face averted, her eyes cast down, she waited for a repetition of the note that was in that last ‘I love you.’ She felt a change in the hands that held hers — a warmth, a

moist softness ; it caused a shock through her veins.

He was trying to draw her nearer, but she kept at full arm's length and looked irresponsible.

‘Marian?’

She wished to answer, but a spirit of perversity held her tongue.

‘Marian, don't you love me? Or have I offended you by my way of speaking?’

Persisting, she at length withdrew her hands. Jasper's face expressed something like dismay.

‘You have not offended me,’ she said. ‘But I am not sure that you don't deceive yourself in thinking, for the moment, that I am necessary to your happiness.’

The emotional current which had passed from her flesh to his whilst their hands were linked made him incapable of standing aloof from her. He saw that her face and neck were warmer hued, and her beauty became more desirable to him than ever yet.

‘You are more to me than anything else in the compass of life!’ he exclaimed, again pressing forward. ‘I think of nothing but you—you yourself—my beautiful, gentle, thoughtful Marian!’

His arm captured her, and she did not resist. A sob, then a strange little laugh, betrayed the passion that was at length unfolded in her.

‘You do love me, Marian?’

‘I love you.’

And there followed the antiphony of ardour that finds its first utterance—a subdued music, often interrupted, ever returning upon the same rich note.

Marian closed her eyes and abandoned herself to the luxury of the dream. It was her first complete escape from the world of intellectual routine, her first taste of life. All the pedantry of her daily toil slipped away like a cumbrous garment; she was clad only in her womanhood. Once or twice a shudder of strange self-consciousness went through her, and she felt guilty, immodest; but upon that sensation followed a surge of passionate joy, obliterating memory and forethought.

‘How shall I see you?’ Jasper asked at length. ‘Where can we meet?’

It was a difficulty. The season no longer allowed lingerings under the open sky, but Marian could not go to his lodgings, and it

seemed impossible for him to visit her at her home.

‘Will your father persist in unfriendliness to me?’

She was only just beginning to reflect on all that was involved in this new relation.

‘I have no hope that he will change,’ she said sadly.

‘He will refuse to countenance your marriage?’

‘I shall disappoint him and grieve him bitterly. He has asked me to use my money in starting a new review.’

‘Which he is to edit?’

‘Yes. Do you think there would be any hope of its success?’

Jasper shook his head.

‘Your father is not the man for that, Marian. I don’t say it disrespectfully; I mean that he doesn’t seem to me to have that kind of aptitude. It would be a disastrous speculation.’

‘I felt that. Of course I can’t think of it now.’

She smiled, raising her face to his.

‘Don’t trouble,’ said Jasper. ‘Wait a little, till I have made myself independent of Fadge

and a few other men, and your father shall see how heartily I wish to be of use to him. He will miss your help, I'm afraid?'

'Yes. I shall feel it a cruelty when I have to leave him. He has only just told me that his sight is beginning to fail. Oh, why didn't his brother leave him a little money? It was such unkindness! Surely he had a much better right than Amy, or than myself either. But literature has been a curse to father all his life. My uncle hated it, and I suppose that was why he left father nothing.'

'But how am I to see you often? That's the first question. I know what I shall do. I must take new lodgings, for the girls and myself, all in the same house. We must have two sitting-rooms; then you will come to my room without any difficulty. These astonishing proprieties are so easily satisfied after all.'

'You will really do that?'

'Yes. I shall go and look for rooms to-morrow. Then when you come you can always ask for Maud or Dora, you know. They will be very glad of a change to more respectable quarters.'

'I won't stay to see them now, Jasper,'

said Marian, her thoughts turning to the girls.

‘Very well. You are safe for another hour, but to make certain you shall go at a quarter to five. Your mother won’t be against us?’

‘Poor mother—no. But she won’t dare to justify me before father.’

‘I feel as if I should play a mean part in leaving it to you to tell your father. Marian, I will brave it out and go and see him.’

‘Oh, it would be better not to.’

‘Then I will write to him—such a letter as he can’t possibly take in ill part.’

Marian pondered this proposal.

‘You shall do that, Jasper, if you are willing. But not yet; presently.’

‘You don’t wish him to know at once?’

‘We had better wait a little. You know,’ she added laughing, ‘that my legacy is only in name mine as yet. The will hasn’t been proved. And then the money will have to be realised.’

She informed him of the details; Jasper listened with his eyes on the ground.

They were now sitting on chairs drawn close to each other. It was with a sense of relief that Jasper had passed from dithyrambs to conver-

sation on practical points; Marian's excited sensitiveness could not but observe this, and she kept watching the motions of his countenance. At length he even let go her hand.

'You would prefer,' he said reflectively, 'that nothing should be said to your father until that business is finished?'

'If you consent to it.'

'Oh, I have no doubt it's as well.'

Her little phrase of self-subjection, and its tremulous tone, called for another answer than this. Jasper fell again into thought, and clearly it was thought of practical things.

'I think I must go now, Jasper,' she said.

'Must you? Well, if you had rather.'

He rose, though she was still seated. Marian moved a few steps away, but turned and approached him again.

'Do you really love me?' she asked, taking one of his hands and folding it between her own.

'I do indeed love you, Marian. Are you still doubtful?'

'You're not sorry that I must go?'

'But I am, dearest. I wish we could sit here undisturbed all through the evening.'

Her touch had the same effect as before. His blood warmed again, and he pressed her to

his side, stroking her hair and kissing her forehead.

‘Are you sorry I wear my hair short?’ she asked, longing for more praise than he had bestowed on her.

‘Sorry? It is perfect. Everything else seems vulgar compared with this way of yours. How strange you would look with plaits and that kind of thing!’

‘I am so glad it pleases you.’

‘There is nothing in you that doesn’t please me, my thoughtful girl.’

‘You called me that before. Do I seem so very thoughtful?’

‘So grave, and sweetly reserved, and with eyes so full of meaning.’

She quivered with delight, her face hidden against his breast.

‘I seem to be new-born, Jasper. Everything in the world is new to me, and I am strange to myself. I have never known an hour of happiness till now, and I can’t believe yet that it has come to me.’

She at length attired herself, and they left the house together, of course not unobserved by the landlady. Jasper walked about half the way to St. Paul’s Crescent. It was arranged

that he should address a letter for her to the care of his sisters ; but in a day or two the change of lodgings would be effected.

When they had parted, Marian looked back. But Jasper was walking quickly away, his head bent, in profound meditation.

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